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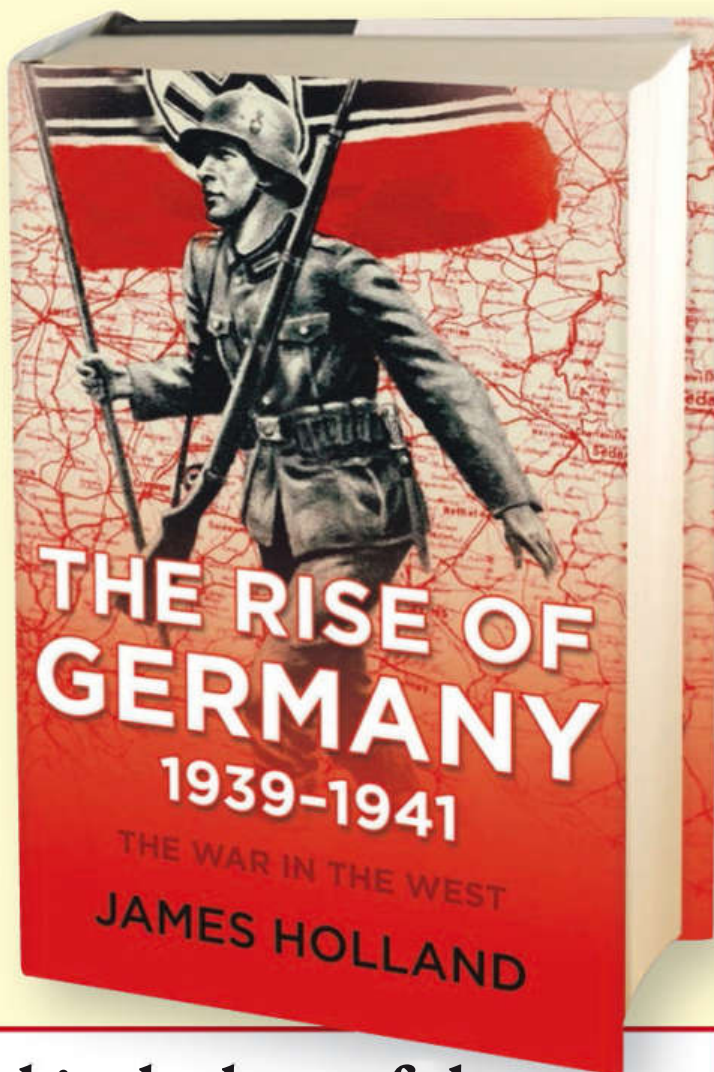
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LETTERS

Poison Pen

As a toxicologist and someone who cares deeply about the environment, I was disappointed to read Andrew Cockburn's "Weed Whackers" [Letter from Washington, September].

At Monsanto, we know we don't have all the answers about how to make agriculture more sustainable, so we think collaboration is essential. We are proud to support and work with world-renowned institutions such as the Missouri Botanical Garden. We also collaborate with scientists in academia and the government.

One of Monsanto's most important products is glyphosate, a tool that farmers have used to control a broad range of weeds for more than forty years. Like all pesticides, glyphosate has undergone extensive safety evaluations by regulatory agencies around the world. These agencies have consistently determined that all labeled uses of glyphosate are safe for human health and the environment. Here in the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency has placed glyphosate in its most favorable category for carcinogenicity. The agency classifies glyphosate as "practically non-toxic" based on single-exposure oral, dermal, and inhalation studies.

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In addition to this very favorable safety profile, glyphosate has enabled a number of important soil-conservation practices in agriculture, including a practice called no-till farming, which allows farmers to grow crops without disturbing the soil. As a result, the soil becomes more fertile and resilient.

We would have been glad to discuss glyphosate's history of safe use and environmental benefits with the writer of this story. However, the writer never reached out to Monsanto, so we did not have that opportunity.

Donna Farmer, Ph.D.

Monsanto Company

St. Louis

Andrew Cockburn responds:

I am naturally pleased that Monsanto confirms major themes of my article, including the company's connections to the Missouri Botanical Garden and its longtime director, not to mention the collaboration—so often publicly unacknowledged—that it enjoys with scientists in academia and government.

However, the corporation's mantra that regulatory agencies around the world have invariably deemed glyphosate safe—a claim I quoted in my article—is increasingly belied by the facts. In September, the California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment announced that it intends to list

glyphosate as “known to the state to cause cancer.” This follows announcements by the governments of France, Colombia, and Sri Lanka that deemed glyphosate unsafe, as well as the announcement in March by the WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer that glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans.” *Harper’s* did indeed contact Monsanto for comment before publication, and the company’s response was quoted multiple times in my piece. Monsanto may spew insults (“junk science”) at the distinguished I.A.R.C. team that studied the carcinogenic effects of glyphosate, but this awkward reality is not going away.

War Stories

After a deeply silly argument regarding narrative mode, a garden-variety rant about M.F.A.’s, and a demand for a twenty-first-century *War and Peace*, Sam Sacks [“First-Person Shooters,” *Reviews*, August], whose review touched on a collection of short stories I coedited, alludes to something quite interesting—perhaps unique to our time and place—going on in contemporary war literature. Modern America tends to view military conflict through the prism of Vietnam, and much of early Vietnam War literature was written and shaped by draftees. But my generation of servicemembers signed up for war, whether or not we signed up explicitly for duty in Iraq or Afghanistan. How does creative work produced by (or about) military volunteers relate to a citizenry separate and distinct from those volunteers? When wars are carried out by the volunteers in the citizenry’s name, but not necessarily with the citizenry’s backing, how does that affect the way stories from those wars are interpreted and understood? Readers are still figuring out how to answer these questions. We writers are still figuring it out, too, whatever our personal backgrounds, and whether the characters in our fiction are combatants fighting in

strange lands or locals enduring military occupation.

Sacks’s call for didactic war lit should give anyone invested in the subject pause. Talking-head literature will only exacerbate the military-civilian divide, that ethereal but pervasive gap between the 1 percent of Americans who have worn the uniform and the 99 percent who have not. Besides, talking-head lit often isn’t any good. As Kingsley Amis said, “Importance isn’t important. Good writing is.” Everyone in the war-writing community would be wise to remember that as we go forward, anxieties about resonance and relatability be damned.

Contemporary war lit is young. The canon will get sharper and smarter, continue to find its breadth, and potentially better itself through it all. Here’s hoping our critics keep up.

Matt Gallagher
Former U.S. Army captain
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Sam Sacks responds:

As I pointed out in my essay, the sameness of so much contemporary war fiction has inadvertently created a kind of stock character—the wounded veteran trying to process his or her past from the fringes of civilian society. Because this figure is so familiar in today’s literary fiction, which emphasizes personal experiences formed from trauma, alienation, and recovery, many critics have found it easy to praise these books and draw from them hollow lessons about empathy and redemption. Mr. Gallagher is within his rights to dismiss the considerations of style and technique that the books have in common (as well as considerations of the dominant ideas in the workshops in which they’re produced), but all of these things go into “good writing.” I absolutely agree that contemporary war literature is young and evolving, and that critics will have to work hard to keep up with it. They’ll also need to speak up if it seems to run aground on cliché.

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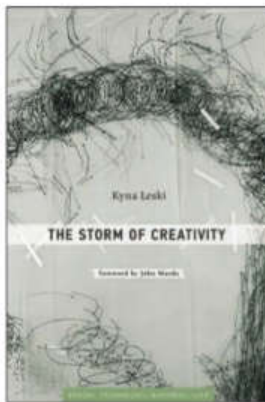
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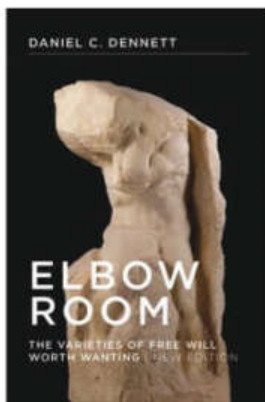
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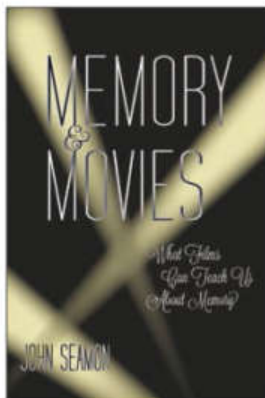
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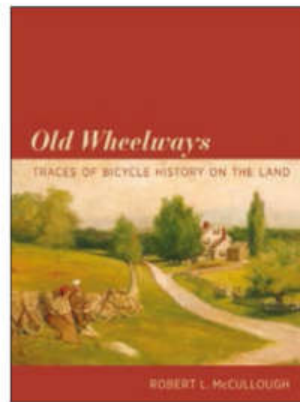
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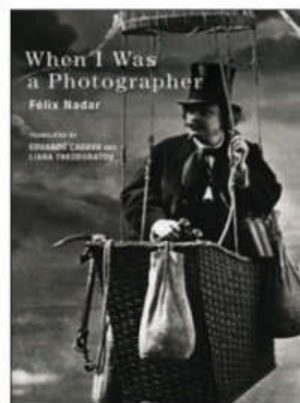
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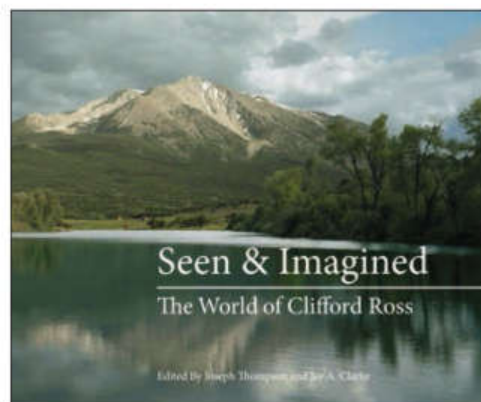


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EASY CHAIR

A Ring-Formed World

By John Crowley

I have recently developed a crank theory, for which I can adduce no real evidence, that the human sense of time has its origins in story, or is at least bound up with the telling of stories. If, as science suggests, we were nomadic creatures for a very long time, changing place often—as the mountain gorilla, one of our fellow primates, does today—then the lives of our ancestors would have been shaped by the sense of leaving one place and moving on a path toward a new place. As we went on, we would form a memory of the earlier place and what we did there, and we would begin to imagine the new place. Would it be better? Would we regret leaving the old place? Once, we were there; now we are here; soon we will be elsewhere. Passing between Here and There, we are in narrative.

“What does a novel do?” E. M. Forster asks in *Aspects of the Novel*. He imagines getting the same answer from many respondents: a novel tells a story. That’s what people expect and what writers of novels are compelled to deliver, lest they suffer (proudly or otherwise) the consequences. Forster acknowledges that some writers—he mentions Gertrude Stein—have contested the domination of story, but while he thinks they have striven honestly, he also thinks they have striven in vain.

In Forster’s terms a story is “a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence”: lunch follows breakfast, Tuesday follows Monday, decay follows death. Its power comes from

the reader’s desire to know what happens next, and “next” is something that happens next in time, even if it’s the arrival of a storyteller who narrates past events. In some stories causality pushes the narrative forward—things happen because other things have happened—but that isn’t necessary: things can merely happen and go on happening with no reason ever to end.

In talking about a book or film, we often use the terms “story” and “plot” interchangeably, but Forster used them to mean different things. “Boy meets girl and then boy joins monastery” is for Forster a story—a series of events in time order. “Boy meets girl, girl spurns boy, and so boy joins monastery” is a plot. In fictions with plots, narrative events are related not simply chronologically but causally, and depend for their effect on ongoing acts of memory: readers have to remember the events in the story in order to understand what caused what else. Often an initiating event begins a plot, and a closing event responds in some way to that initiating event and tells us the story is over. We might say that “story” is the name for the ongoing adventures of the characters as they occur, while “plot” is the name for the events seen in the light of their ending.

“Boy joins monastery, and no one knows why, until it is learned that he was spurned by the girl.” This is a plot with a mystery in it, which Forster calls “a form capable of high development.” Notice that in my example the boy’s joining the mon-

astery is narrated first, though it comes later in time. The causative logic of plots with mysteries is not fully revealed until the end, and the timeline of these stories does not necessarily proceed from past to present in a straightforward series of and-thens; instead the telling is often bent or altered or even reversed. Classic detective stories commonly proceed in two directions at once: the detective moves through a series of interviews, searches, and incomplete accounts, which lead him step-by-step back through the sequence of events that culminated in the murder. In effect, the detective goes forward in time while the story of the murder unfolds backward. As Jean-Luc Godard remarked, a story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order. Time—its direction, its passage, its conditioning of action—is the backbone of all fiction, and as we have become more expert at living with and in the complex possibilities of time, so have our fictions.

Novels must by default be about people, Forster asserts, though we can extend that judgment to cover other sufficiently peoplelike entities—fairies, aliens, orcs, robots. But *Homo fictus*—the species of beings who inhabit fiction—actually differs from *Homo sapiens* in interesting ways. We out here must eat every day (or suffer if we don’t); they in there need food chiefly as social glue. We sleep away a third of our lives; they rarely spend any time

asleep—usually no more than a line break. Out here every person has equal ontological standing—that is, we each experience ourselves as the center of the lived world—but in books there are only a few such centers, often just one, and everyone else consists solely of observed actions and speech.

In the world we denominate as real, events in time can be experienced as subjectively longer or shorter—an experience that is familiar, indeed central, to fictional people—but nevertheless our clocks and the planet go on turning in an unbroken continuum from the past toward the future, at the rate of one second per second, one hour per hour, one day per day. In fiction, time passes at a rate that expresses the world of the story and the nature—you might say the soul—of the characters. Days can go by in a sentence, years in a paragraph, and then a single half hour of a character's life will take a whole half hour to read about. Time that means nothing or adds nothing to a story can be left out. Our morning commute may seem endless or it may seem brief, but it can't be shrunk to a sentence or got rid of with a relative clause. ("When she got to work the next day...") No, we've got to do it; the hour has to pass.

But the greatest difference between how things are here and how the same things appear in novels is this: in our world, causes produce effects; in novels, effects bring about causes. The final weddings in a Jane Austen novel—which Austen has identified in advance, very likely before beginning to write—determine the events and decisions and coincidences that will bring those weddings about. This is essentially what Alfred Hitchcock's concept of the MacGuffin implies: if the workings of the MacGuffin—the gimmick in a story, the thing sought or feared by its characters—will not bring about the desired ending, it's not the ending but the MacGuffin that must be changed.

Success, a novel by the Russian-English writer Sebastian Knight, openly employs this reversal of cause and effect—a move that the Russian

formalist critics of the 1920s called "baring the device." Sebastian Knight certainly didn't know this term, and not only because he is himself an imaginary character in Vladimir Nabokov's first novel written in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. In *Success* (which exists only as Nabokov's summary), we are told of a salesman, Percival Q, who one evening meets by seeming chance a young woman, Anne, a "conjurer's assistant, with whom he will be happy ever after." The remainder of the imaginary novel examines how Q and Anne were brought together on that evening: how they passed through the city unknown to each other, making choices to do this and not that, to go this way instead of the other:

In each case fate seemed to have prepared such a meeting with the utmost care; touching up now this possibility now that one; screening exits and repainting signposts; narrowing in its creeping grasp the bag of the net where the butterflies were flapping; timing the least detail and leaving nothing to chance.

Of course fate has nothing to do with it except as a mask worn by the author (and by the author of the author), who is the one staging a boy-meets-girl story that ends with the boy meeting the girl. Readers often realize what the ending of a novel will be long before they get there; they guess how the successive events are bound to produce the conclusion. But in *Success* the (imagined) reader knows, and can take delight in knowing, that the opposite is also true: the final meeting, destined from the beginning, is the cause of all the events that brought it about.

Everything that fictional characters do over the course of their life spans (which may consist of only a year, a week, or a single day) is constructed by their conclusion: an ending that determines all that comes before, not only by its unavoidable placement—the last page's last paragraph—but often by its distributive or judging power as well. By that I mean that novels can end with justice achieved and ev-

erything wrapped up, or they can end in the middle of things with nothing resolved, but they must end. The characters themselves might not give evidence of knowing this necessity, but their author knows—more exactly you might say that their *book* knows, for the author, having finished the book, is done with them.

If a living being from our world were somehow to find herself among what Forster calls "the nations of fiction," this is the greatest difference she'd perceive between herself and the characters she meets: she has no ending yet, and won't have one until it's reached—the timing of which she can't know, even if she's mortally ill or sitting on death row. The characters, on the other hand, are governed by their endings. To her, they'd give the illusion of moving forward while having the strange unbound grace of people in films run backward. She alone would subsist in a freedom that would surely seem to the others at once giddy and hellish—they can't live randomly, and would be spoiled as characters if their free will were anything other than illusory; she can only be free, even if she believes in destiny. Central to this incongruity is time, which in fiction passes not from the beginning of the universe to its inconceivable end but only from the first page to the last—and that last page, like a Calvinist election, determines all that goes before.

Of course readers experience narrative chronology differently: we feel that people in stories are subject to time in just the way that we are. We know that the end of the story is already determined—it's in print!—yet as we read we feel that a fictional character is capable of choice, and that her fate is always in doubt. Isn't it strange? Late in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland worries that she and Henry Tilney might never marry—an anxiety that, Austen writes, "can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity." Does that

confession spoil our suspension of disbelief, if there really ever is such a suspension? If we sense that the writer has jiggered time to make certain outcomes inevitable, we might feel cheated, or we can be gratified to recognize a beloved story form worked out in the familiar way; in any case, we know that the people we have come to love and hate and fear for have no choice at all in what they do.

Does this attitude toward novels seem aggressive, deflating, even snotty? The attempt of a weary cynic to show the straw inside Elizabeth Bennet and Raskolnikov and the rest? It's really not: I want to show that the limits that fictional characters seem to suffer are what make them finally more free than we are, not less, and more consequential in their realm than we are in ours. This is why we are drawn to them, why we never forget them and their acts.

In his essay "On the Marionette Theater," the weird German writer Heinrich von Kleist takes up similarly contradictory conditions in a very different art, and reaches conclusions that resemble mine. While wandering in a park, Kleist meets his friend C, a famous dancer, whom he has seen visiting the puppet show. This dancer's interest in puppetry surprises Kleist. But C tells him that he loves the marionettes. A good dancer could learn from them, he says, but could never surpass them, since they have qualities that living dancers don't.

These marionettes, like fairies, use the earth only as a point of departure; they return to it only to renew the flight of their limbs with a momentary pause. We, on the other hand, need the earth: for rest, for repose from the effort of the dance; but this rest of ours is, in itself, obviously not dance; and we can do no better than disguise our moments of rest as much as possible.

Puppets haven't discovered gravity, know nothing of inertia—the real-world laws that human dancers must labor (and will always fail) to transcend. It is not despite but *because*

they are inanimate that they can become pure animation, as the puppeteer grants his own life to their suppler, freer bodies.

A visual-effects artist I know tells me that Kleist's essay is well known in the world of animation, where characters transcend physics even more vividly than puppets can and inhabit a world more perfectly expressive of their desires and frustrations. If it's hard for a human dancer to achieve the grace of the jointed doll, it's impossible for a human to do what an animated person can do. As C says of the puppets, "Only a god can duel with matter on this level, and it is at this point that the two ends of the ring-formed world grasp each other."

Just as the puppet and the cartoon character evade the tug of physics, so the fictional character, whose course is fixed immutably, transcends the force of time—and in the same exhilarating and heartening way, through a reversal of cause and effect. How can people so constrained by their endings seem as rich in possibilities as we are, or actually more so? How can freedom seem to reside in fiction, and constraint in physical life? I think it's because however time may hurt or baffle characters in fiction, it is at bottom made for them and by them. Time in fiction, like love in fiction and streets and houses and blood and money in fiction, is made only of meaning, unlike the ribbon that we ride, or that rides through us, which is indifferent to human need. Time in fiction stretches and shrinks like the bodies in animated films, gets rearranged and loses parts, all to produce the causes that will achieve the endings that characters need or deserve. This grants an interior freedom to fictional characters that we don't have, though it's a freedom they may never know about. And just as they need our knowledge of them in order to exist, so do we need their apparent freedom to raise our spirits as we make our timebound way around the ring-formed world from There to Here and on to There again, beginning and middle without end. ■

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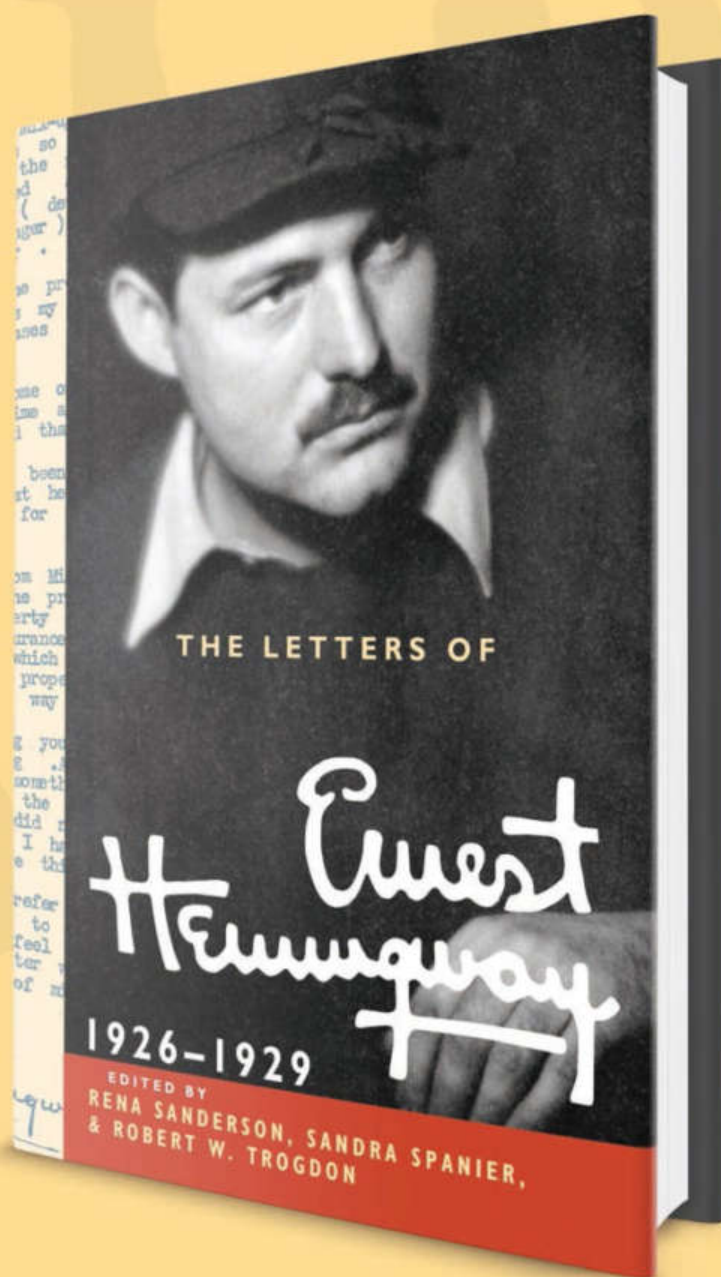
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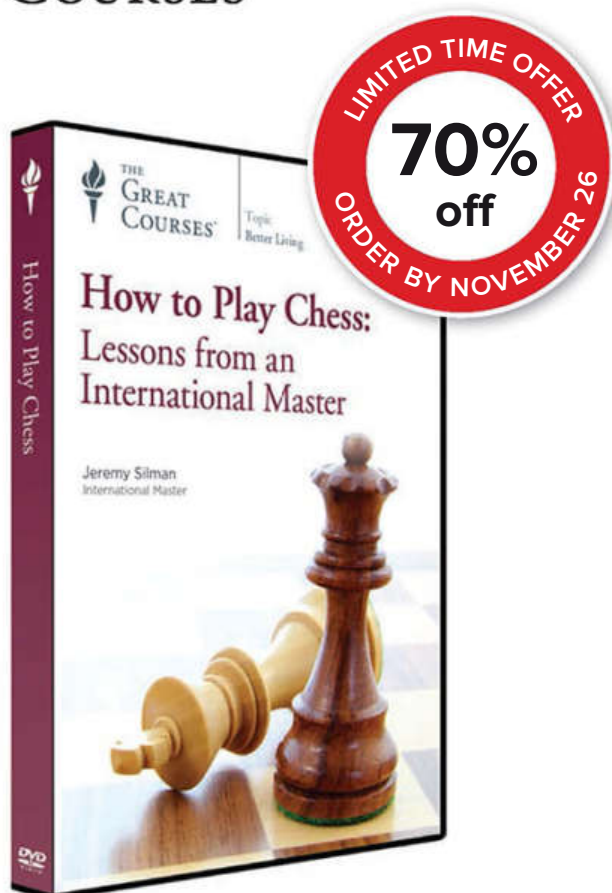


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READINGS

[Definition]

THERE'S THE RUB

By Brian Blanchfield, from *Proxies*, an essay collection that will be published in April by Nightboat Books. Blanchfield is the author, most recently, of *A Several World*, a volume of poetry.

I can't bring myself to rhyme it with "cottage," but I've heard it pronounced that way. The French pronunciation makes it sound like a delectation, a frill or a whip, a froth. Anyway that's the one I say when I say it. I don't know when I first had the word, or whose word it was—not someone I did it with. I know I was doing it without a word for it, and with men who didn't seem to have a preestablished idea of the thing or its name, young men doing what comes naturally. Put their mouths together in a kiss and between their bodies no room for daylight.

Like other sex terms founded in circumspection (I imagine it used capably in one of the poems Auden kept in a drawer), *frottage* is unstable in its definition, particularly at the dividing lines of generation and orientation. Among older straight people, it seems primarily to mean a sociopathic, furtive rubbing against strangers in crowded places like subway cars. ("Masher!" was the cry in sitcoms already long in syndication when I was young—followed by a customary whack to the head with a heavy purse, whereupon over the laugh track the hapless innocent taken for pervert stammers his explanation.) As it happens, furtiveness (I'll claim it) is one of my defining attributes, and something I miss about New York is the erotic charge of returned glances in crowded places, and even the brush of intention under the

cover of accident. I have leaned back yes into excessive leaning. But frottage, to gay guys I know, has nothing to do with that.

Frottage is rather a broad category of consensual, nonpenetrative, (usually) hands-free sex wherein both ideally naked bodies press against each other frontally (most often), and genital stimulation for one or both is achieved by rhythmic movement along the vertical axes of the bodies. If the two are no longer standing, verticality is remembered in the movements that the bodies find. Up and down rather than in and out, as a general rule. The grinding, in my experience, begins crotch to crotch and eventually comes to situate one guy along and against the other guy's perineum; frequently this gets fervid enough that you come away abraded or achy, depending. Variants are endless. *Frottage*, as a term, is not necessarily specific to men with men; it's also a kind of sex women have with women; although *tribbing*—similar in principle, I think, and similarly variable—and *scissoring*, missionary or otherwise, are terms not shared by cisgender men. I'm not sure what along these lines men and women do together, though I think *dry humping* is still a term in use, which raises the question: to what extent is frottage, or whatever wordless thing it is we do with one another and have done for millennia, understood as *simulating* penetrative sex? To say it is derivative of intercourse discounts the draw it has: you follow your partner's pleasure there. But as pleasure builds it's not unusual for one to say to the other, "I want you inside me," or "I can feel what it would feel like to be inside you."

It was at first a surprise, and then a kind of discovery I came to expect—like sex itself, both singular and repeatable—that the partners I found in New York were, same as in North Carolina, where I'm from, rarely expressly into penetration. What did we solve—a metaphysics, a phobia?—each time

[Poem]

RELEASE THE DARKNESS TO NEW LICHEN

By Peter Gizzi, from the spring issue of *Granta*.
Gizzi's selected poems, *In Defense of Nothing*, was
published last year by Wesleyan University Press.

but I found a way to say no
to the wood in my house

it kept creaking
wouldn't stop talking

I found a way to say no

I need to be standing
in the warmth of the wood
that the sun made

I need to find myself dissolving

otherwise it is all otherwise
I'm lost, did I say that

I saw the frill of light today
walking on the path

could you hear the stirring
in the wood, pine needles
and the branches

was it wind or a creature
am I here or is it over

this was the first day
the nothing day
in the nothing year

it gave me courage

it gave hints of blue,
clouds, electric
and dancing

it gave me rays
I've never seen

shooting down
touching things

this was the first day

we kept the sex exterior? Sometimes we marveled that we should have found such a fit, that we were called to this (we coaxed each other), that if before tonight there had been a script there was with each other a thrill in ditching it. How little the world knew!: ever the cry of the lover. Here's the thing about that time that doesn't seem transhistorical. Easily half the guys who hours before had been strangers said or else heard me say, in an early pause, catching our breath or resetting to attune to the ambient moment: "We don't have to do anything." The opening for disinclination was the space of intimacy. As hesitation, it often functioned anyway as aphrodisiac; and as pass, password. You're like me. We're okay.

At a time, in the mid-Nineties, when New York saw its climbing AIDS death rate reach the highest level in the history of the epidemic, regular daily dosage of AZT and other medications (together known as the cocktail) was determined a lifesaving protocol for the walking ill and infected, if they were not too far fallen already. Neither fact in this treacherous chiasmus would be evident—or believable—until much later. I arrived in the city in June 1996, and found the gaunt, unsteady, depleted men fifteen or twenty years older than me to be much as I had imagined them, back in Chapel Hill: aged beyond their years, lost ("wasting" is the medical term) inside sweaters far too large and occasionally insufficient for the purpose of concealing the sarcoma lesions that emerged anyway at the neckline or cuff. That summer Thanatos and Eros was an intersection quite as real as Christopher and Hudson. The tragedy selected me from central casting to cross their paths; I was functionally necessary to complete the tragedy, in fact. To elicit in a man a glance and then from somewhere his instant reproval of that glance, to watch the flicker of interest stanch, renounced altogether (an apostasy on those streets) or else transmuted to raw resentment, even dark prophecy for the fresh, healthy arriviste. A few times audibly: *Fuck you*. It was only in books I knew the concept of queer tutelage.

Does any fifteen-year-old ask: what is the maturation end point of my sexuality? Where is this thing going, this burgeoning attraction to—in my case—other boys? Is there someone out there who has arrived where I want to be? Can I visualize lasting fulfillment? No. Mostly the future he imagines is fantasy's subjunctive version of the present, were the beloved here now next to me with his impossible eyelashes, his snug jeans, and his heart-racing smirk: what might happen. But in 1988 extrapolation tugged heavily on otherwise sexy contingent if/then calculations. It was grave. I mean, mine was a generation like those before and after that deeply, darkly valued the category *faggot*, which organized



Born to Be Late, a painting by Albert Oehlen, whose work was on view in September at the New Museum, in New York City.

like a lodestar all nascent masculinity, choreographing in any room or gym or field how far from one another we stood. In 1988, if you privately understood you were gay and you were capable of basic logical continuity, you had made the implicit equation between your own attraction to men and the depthless suffering of AIDS victims stranded in their crisis on the nightly news—and not just their appreciable agony but also their leprous toxicity. Reports regularly stressed their reckless, even willful communication of the virus to others. Sex between men that resulted in infection was in some instances prosecuted as attempted murder or manslaughter, and men who spat on H.I.V.-negative cops were maximally sentenced for aggravated assault.

For so much lethality the American imagination needed monsters to blame and to fear; likewise, to justify the paternalistic hard lines that might be drawn to keep its children safe. The corruption of the young innocent was to be avenged—until the moment he seroconverted, whereupon he too was hastened into villainy. Many of the men sick in San Francisco and New York were dying disowned by their families of origin. Programmatic mass quarantine was debated, and camps—camps—were publicly contemplated. Late in the Reagan presidency William F. Buckley proposed in a reasonable tone an emergency measure to tattoo the buttocks of all H.I.V.-positive men as a “warning” to potential sex partners. I can recall Tom Brokaw managing

the phrase “tattoo the buttocks”: an indignity to him, one felt. America beheld in its mind’s eye for a moment the firm young ass unwrapped, the quarry somewhere of the sodomite whose predation would be foiled by the guile of the state. Let me be candid: I had no better (and no less prurient) idea than anyone around me about what “counted” as gay sex. But that news came within weeks of the day I ceased in my autoerotic life the ludicrous rationing bargains I had made with myself regarding images of girls instead of boys. I remember in the complex acceptance a feeling of immanent correctness, consigning myself to a short life expiring on one of the already iconic cots, abandoned, ravaged, fouled, destitute, panicked, eyes listing in their bony orbits. I was what I was; it was in me already.

I never had a sex life without having a status. The two were inextricable. My early vision of partnership was in fact sealed fast by H.I.V.: if finally you and he were infected and allegiance followed whatever tearful forgiveness, it seemed to me you could not uncouple, conjoined in the blood. That was my gay marriage. The brave intimacy, and then hurtling undead together through the newly meaningless trappings of the world, liberated by the worst once it had happened. It took years to learn that a lot of guys my age harbored this fantasy.

That our psyches were similarly imprinted by the epidemic was the kind of thing you learned, I learned, one-on-one, in bed, often after sensing—in the compatibility of what we found hot, which limits and uncertainties we had eroticized—that our bodies, too, already belonged to AIDS. The leap, if you dared, in the logic of contagion, was that consequently we belonged to each other, were responsible to each other (pass it on); these bonds, these pairings, were, I started to trust, fastening a social order among us, by which we might raise one another into an unforeseen adult queerness. It would be manifold, loving, defiant, permissive, heedful, like our encounters. It would be a slow build.

I had been in New York three months—fewer than a dozen people in the world knew my address and phone number—when, in September 1996, in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, I received a call from the New York State Health Department. I was alone. The conversation was quick. A health official tersely delivered the news: Benjamin Rowan (name altered here) had listed me as a sex partner and had tested positive for H.I.V. somewhere in Georgia. It was urgent that I make an appointment to be tested myself before a date two weeks from then; the result would be reported to both me and the state. With no doctor or insurance (I was working as an office temp), I

took the number and the Bedford-Stuyvesant address they gave me, and hung up. It was happening. I wasn’t yet out to my parents. I recounted to myself each time—eight, nine—that Ben and I had been together, and turned forensic in my memory. I planned my next steps. I called and emailed Ben. No answer. His former roommates in Charlotte weren’t helpful about where or why he was out of state. But they had mail to forward to him and would give him the message to call me. I had to tell David, whom I was dating in New York. He decided to stay where he was that night, with his brother’s friends in the city, and for the next several days. He said he’d wait and see what would happen, didn’t much see why he should worry. The day came; I transferred from the F to the C train, which I had never taken farther into Brooklyn, and got off at Nostrand. The clinic was busy—there as on the train I stood out for my whiteness—and the practitioner I met with semiprivately was frank: As many as half the people who were testing at that center would be H.I.V. positive, even more who’d had phone calls like mine. I should think about my support system. I should return in ten days to get my results in person.

It was very early one morning when Ben finally called; he was keeping strange hours, had been working as a club promoter in Atlanta. He sounded weird, stoned, exhausted, or just remote, and told me that he hadn’t been with anyone since me, and since he and I had been exclusive in the months we were together, he had concluded that I must have infected him. His tone sharpened; he didn’t want to talk anymore. That was that, this is it, I kept saying to myself in the emotional free fall of the next several hours.

The day of my trip back to Bed-Stuy was a crucible, some kind of parable in danger and courage. After the transfer, a couple of stops in, two young men about my age stepped separately into the C train and stood facing each other at opposite ends of our car, hurling threats, spitting invectives. This was the end of a chase. Within a few seconds each had drawn a handgun, and their voices began to rise and even to shriek. Their rage was full of real, mortal fear. Many of us on the train began to look down and still our movements, as if any of us could disappear. I think they would have killed each other had an older man in the middle of the car not stood between them, speaking to both with his hands outstretched, alternating his eyes’ attention, balancing. He must have been seventy-five, hair entirely white, his face bumpy with black freckles; in a sure, even voice, he began to tell them what was going to happen next. He conducted them from the middle, insisting as the train was slowing for the next stop that the man at the far end get off, save

two lives if not more, and just walk on. He did, and when the doors closed, the gunman closer to me began to shake uncontrollably. Pin-drop silence until he departed too, at the next station platform. I followed him off. It was my stop. The results were waiting. I was negative.

Ben, too. I found out weeks later, when he returned more of my calls, that his test had been a false positive. The blood bank had been mistaken. Georgia and New York stood down. The worst had happened and then had been undone.

I went on undoing it.

[Diagnosis]

OBJECT LESSON

From When the Sun Bursts, by Christopher Bollas, out this month from Yale University Press. Bollas has been a practicing psychoanalyst for more than forty years.

People who work with schizophrenics often describe something that might be called schizophrenic presence, or the experience of being with someone who has seemingly crossed from the human world to the nonhuman. It can be an eerie and uncomfortable feeling. Those who knew the schizophrenic before his or her breakdown may feel that they are encountering the person's bizarre double. Action is accomplished painfully. Ordinary, everyday gestures become mechanical. The schizophrenic reaches for a cup of coffee in tensile slow motion, his torso moving first, as if corseted by some hidden metal fabric, his shoulders and arms operating in curious opposition to each other, as if he were simultaneously reaching both toward and away from the object. He approaches the cup as if it were dangerous. He might take five minutes on the first sip and seem to derive no pleasure from drinking. He might blink rapidly, or abruptly push the cup away as if afraid it will attack him. We see a robotic self, one that appears to have no subjectivity, no interior.

Strangely, though the person seems mechanical, the object does not; it is approached as if it were alive and might spring into some unforeseen action. This conviction, rarely voiced, is uttered through the tacit language of the body.

Sometimes, the clinician finds himself in freakish agreement, seized by the thought that the mug might indeed go flying across the room. He, too, starts to feel afraid of ordinary objects. Is this simply concern that the patient may throw the thing, or drop it? The clinician is not sure.

Perhaps for this reason, staff members in residential settings are unnaturally calm. They move in slow motion, they speak simply and deliberately, they smile a lot and look at their patients with a doe-eyed gaze.

[Objection]

PETA PEEVE

From a complaint filed in June against the State of North Carolina by PETA and other plaintiffs, including Beth A. Sparks, an adviser to the National Opossum Society who "has personally worked with 4,700 opossums over the last 21 years."

Clay Logan owns Clay's Corner, a general store and gas station in Brasstown. Over the past years, Logan has conducted the so-called Opossum Drop on New Year's Eve. Live opossums have not always been used. In press interviews, Logan has stated that "it don't really matter what's in the box." Prior events featured a road-killed opossum (shampooed, blow-dried, and frozen), a porcelain opossum figurine, an empty box decorated with photos of opossums, and a pot reportedly filled with opossum stew.

In April 2013, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Possum Right to Work Act to authorize a license for exhibiting a live opossum at the Opossum Drop—provided that Logan met requirements for holding wild animals in captivity. This included treating the opossum humanely. However, the opossum was left in subfreezing temperatures for many hours, had injuries to her face, and was not provided with water. On April 25, 2014, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission issued an official warning of non-compliance. Within days, Representative Roger West introduced a second bill that effectively placed the Opossum Drop above the law. On April 14, 2015, Representative West introduced a third bill broadening the scope from Clay County to the entire State of North Carolina.

Exempting a special-interest group from prohibitions against the unlicensed, unregulated exhibition of opossums is not rationally related to any legitimate governmental purpose. To explain the 2015 act, Representative Pat McElraft reportedly stated: "We don't need PETA coming in here telling this community they can't do something." This is not a permissible basis for creating a statutory classification.



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BLAIN|SOUTHERN

"A Mountain of Salt, 2005," a photograph by Wim Wenders, whose work is on view this month at Blain|Southern in Berlin.

When this calm breaks down it can be startling. I once watched a therapist who had been sitting silently for some twenty minutes next to a mute schizophrenic. Suddenly, by apparent accident, the schizophrenic nudged a magazine off the arm of the sofa. In response, the therapist jumped up with such force that she banged into a coffee table and fell on her face. As she excused herself, upset and disoriented, I saw the patient smile.

What was he smiling about? I don't know. But it seems reasonable to assume that, for a moment, he was pleased to have brought about in his companion the kind of terror that was usually his alone.

The therapist jumped up, of course, not because the magazine was dangerous but because its movement embodied the potential movement of the patient. The patient was the magazine; as it fell, so might he. But instead, as the magazine fell, so did the therapist. In this way she experienced firsthand the frightening world on the other side, the world of the belief that objects are just barely asleep and can awake at

any moment to do something sudden, bewildering, and dangerous.

The schizophrenic reveals the hallucinogenic potential of the object world. He has seen the object change its character. It cannot be trusted. His self-transformation is consequently protective: objects may come alive to destroy him, but if the self is not there to begin with it cannot be damaged.

Clinicians who react to the patient with unreal calm are unconsciously, and astutely, meeting the patient halfway. They are attempting to operate in an intermediate zone between the psychotic and nonpsychotic worlds, a neutral territory where there is no strong affect. Here, observations are of a very simple kind. Speech is slowed down, language laundered of color. With the aim of being completely unthreatening, the clinician transforms herself into an impossibly benign form of being, an exoskeleton of the human.

If clinicians were to behave like this in any other circumstance, they would seem very disturbed indeed.

[Experience]

PERVERSION THERAPY

From testimony given by Benjamin Unger, a plaintiff in Ferguson v. JONAH and one of five former clients of JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing) who filed a lawsuit against the New Jersey nonprofit in 2012. JONAH was found guilty of consumer fraud in June and ordered to pay \$72,400 in damages. David Dinielli is Unger's attorney. Alan Downing is a counselor for JONAH.

DAVID DINIELLI: Good morning, Benji.

BENJAMIN UNGER: Good morning.

DINIELLI: Thinking about the first few sessions with Alan Downing, can you tell the jury what you discussed?

UNGER: Yeah. The predominant issue that came up was who I was attracted to, what their names were, all their physical attributes, which body parts I was attracted to, and to describe them at length.

DINIELLI: Benji, do you recognize this handwriting?

UNGER: Yes.

DINIELLI: Whose is it?

UNGER: Mr. Downing's.

DINIELLI: Benji, does looking at this remind you of what you and Alan Downing talked about at your August 30, 2007, session?

UNGER: It was a very, I would say, big topic of many of the sessions. It was basically my—my attraction to butts.

DINIELLI: Did you have any idea that Alan Downing was drawing a diagram during this session?

UNGER: No. I never—no. I definitely didn't know that.

DINIELLI: I see words that say, "I am cute," "play with me," "fluffy butt." Do you know what that is?

UNGER: I do not. These are not my words.

DINIELLI: What percentage of sessions that you had with Alan Downing would you estimate involved discussing particular body parts that you found attractive?

UNGER: Specific body parts? I would say around 80 to 90 percent.

DINIELLI: Benji, can you read that?

UNGER: "Ben wanted to understand how to interpret the sensation that he most often associates with S.S.A."

DINIELLI: What did Alan Downing say about that?

UNGER: He was talking about when I have erections, if that means it's a same-sex-attraction erection.

DINIELLI: In trying to help you understand those, did Mr. Downing use any analogies?

UNGER: Yes. He compared it to when your nephew sits on your lap and you get an erection.

DINIELLI: Did that make any sense to you?

UNGER: No.

DINIELLI: In addition to the individual counseling with JONAH, what kinds of things happened at the group counseling sessions?

UNGER: We did a lot of exercises. We had what they called healthy touch sessions.

DINIELLI: What is healthy touch?

UNGER: So healthy touch, we were told, was that if you learn how to touch other men, but you focus on it being in a healthy way instead of a sexual way, you'll lose some of the sexuality involved with touching. So on one occasion, we were told to pick someone in the group that we wanted to do healthy touch with, preferably somebody we were attracted to. And then we were told to lie on the floor and to hold each other, to cuddle. And then the lights were dimmed. There was some really, really, really slow music playing in the background. And Alan Downing was in the middle sitting there, like, kind of watching over us.

DINIELLI: Was hugging common in group sessions?

UNGER: There was a lot of hugging.

DINIELLI: Does anything else stand out from your experiences in group sessions?

[Litany]

JADED LADY

From headlines that appeared between 1992 and 2014 in the New York Times.

Travel Light? Yeah, Right!
Limit Use of Presidential Perks? Yeah, Right.
Talk to Parents About Sex? Yeah, Right.
The City of Romance? Yeah, Right!
Don't Worry? Yeah, Right.
Mellowing with Age? Yeah, Right.
King of My Castle? Yeah, Right.
Come as You Are? Hardly.
Truth or Consequences? Hardly.
No Child Left Behind? Hardly.
Those Were the Good Old Days? Hardly.
True Grit? Not So Much, Anymore.
Elite? Not So Much Anymore.
A Wonderful Life? Not So Much.
A Faux Pas? Get Over It!
Madoff Victims, Get Over It.
Geeks, You Are No Longer Victims. Get Over It.
The Cold War: Get Over It.
Food; Get Over It.

UNGER: I was told to take a pillow and imagine that the pillow was my mother. And I was given a tennis racket and I was told to lift the racket over my head and start beating the pillow while yelling “Mom” the entire time.

DINIELLI: Did anything significant happen in individual counseling sessions?

UNGER: Yeah. In Alan’s office there was this wooden mirror right in the middle of the room. I was told to walk to the mirror. Alan was directly behind me. And at first, I was told to kind of just look into the mirror, observe myself a little bit, feel my body. And then I was told, let’s—let’s go a step further. And I was told to take off my shirt. I felt uncomfortable, but I took off my shirt. At one point, he put his hands on my shoulder. I felt him breathing on my neck. And then I was told to look at my body, you know, kind of feel my masculinity. And then I was told to take my pants off. I couldn’t.

DINIELLI: How did that make you feel, Benji?

UNGER: For lack of a better word, extremely weird.

DINIELLI: Has the way that you feel about being gay changed since you left the JONAH program?

UNGER: Yes. I enjoy my life now. It’s not perfect, but it’s—I think it’s totally fine. As I become a healthy gay man, I realize that everything I was told was a lie.

[Fiction]

THE HANGED MAN

From War, So Much War, by Mercè Rodoreda, published this month by Open Letter. Rodoreda, who died in 1983, was the author of several other novels, including The Time of the Doves. Translated from the Catalan by Maruxa Relañó and Martha Tennent.

A large sack suspended from a tree was swinging back and forth, and from it emerged the head of a man with a straight, taut rope behind it. His face was white, his tongue black, his lips purple. By the tree, just beneath the hanged man’s feet, was a rock; I climbed on it and cut the rope. The hanged man crashed to the ground and hit his head, frightening me so much that I was sure I had killed him instead of saving him. He was young, with black hair and bushy eyebrows. Just as I was thinking that he had surrendered his soul to God, he opened one eye and immediately closed it again. He hadn’t the strength to hold my gaze. After a

while he sat up halfway, and I helped him as he struggled to climb out of the sack. He snapped at me angrily, in a husky voice that seemed to come from beyond the grave: Why did you cut the rope?

For a long time, who’s to say how long, he struggled to breathe. Give me some water. . . . I’m suffocating. I rushed down to the river and, using a jar I found in his haversack, brought him some. I held his head with one hand and poured it down his throat with the other. He coughed with every attempt; the effort was wearing him out, and finally his head dropped to the side. All of a sudden he revived. If I climbed into the sack to hang myself it’s because I wanted a shroud covering me when I died, to keep the vultures from picking the flesh off my bones if my body wasn’t found in time to be buried. And what about your head? I asked. My head, he said, they can have it. For all the good it’s done me. He grasped his neck with both hands and tightened his grip. Maybe this way it won’t hurt so much. Pour some more water down me. You look hungry. There’s some bread in my bag. I can’t even swallow my own saliva. My tongue is swollen. Keep me company. He had me lie down beside him and we covered ourselves with the sack. As I lay there, half-asleep, surrounded by sylvan scents, I could hear the dull sound of a far-away conversation. I would travel the world, I would help others, I would save lives. The stars above us seemed to be ushering away the night, and yet it would be a long time before morning dawned.

I made this sack out of four sacks I stole from the mill. Lying with his face to the sky, the hanged man spoke as if in a dream. From time to time he turned his head and looked at me. One whole day it took me to undo the seams and re-sew them in a different shape, using a sack needle, pushing the string through the holes. I made one sack out of the four. I left two sections unsewed so I could stick my arms through, tie the sack to my neck, and slip on the rope collar with the slip-knot. The hanged man began to weep with sadness. I gave him a good slap on the back to stop his crying and stood up. Don’t leave me, don’t leave me. Just when I was resolved to snatch Ernestina away from her scoundrel of a husband, she left me. Went back to him! Her husband came looking for me one day and he broke down. He knelt and confessed to me that he was lost without Ernestina. Promise me you won’t take her from me. Give me some water. I told him Ernestina and I had parted ways some time before. And her husband said, She must have someone else then. We embraced and walked out into the street. When I met her she was wearing a red



"Joshua Tree National Park #2," a photograph by Ken Kitano, whose work was on view in March at ROSEGALLERY, in Santa Monica, California.

dress and had a daisy in her hair. We went from tavern to tavern; in every tavern, a swig. And then, surprise: at Papagai's, I met Faustina. He coughed, his voice growing hoarser as he spoke. And it was as though Ernestina had never existed. He lay there a while without opening his mouth, and when he said, I curse the day she let me enter her house, I thought his strength had given out, but he went on. The same day Faustina let me in her house and allowed me to kiss her behind the ear. She coiled around me like a snake. Straightaway I explained it all to Ernestina's husband, and he told his wife. To Faustina I confessed that I had loved Ernestina and that her husband and I were like brothers ... and I still don't know what happened, but shortly thereafter the four of us took to frequenting the taverns together: Ernestina friends with Faustina, Faustina friends with Ernestina's husband, and all three of them latching on to me. Not an hour went by

that I didn't feel watched, spied on, my steps shadowed. It was me against the three of them.... Them against me. Ernestina was defending Paulina one night when the four of us were walking down a street whose name I don't recall. I asked the hanged man who Paulina was, and, after giving it some thought, he said he had mis-spoken, he had never known any Paulina and he meant to say "Faustina," not "Paulina." I just couldn't take that kind of life anymore, he continued. None of us made love, we had only reproaches for one another. I hated that dependency and yet I couldn't live without it. Until finally the war came and I enlisted right away in hopes of saving my soul. But the war has finished me. Emptied me of everything, surrounded me with death and blood. I died some time ago; why should I wish to breathe and possess a body that I despise and that persistently demands sleep, food, and sorrow? I mean joy, it asks for joy, even if just

a little, but finds only sorrow. Why, why did you unhang me? He leaned in to punch me and fell backward as if I had punched him instead. I wrapped him in the sack and dragged him behind

[Trend]

SELFIE STYX

From news reports of injuries and deaths since 2014 that occurred during attempts to take selfies.

A Polish couple on vacation in Portugal fell off a cliff while attempting to take a selfie with their two children.

In the Philippines, a teenage girl participating in a group selfie after a birthday party was swept away by a wave and drowned.

An intoxicated Russian man toppled a statue of Lenin by attempting to take a selfie while hanging from the statue's arm.

A bison in Yellowstone National Park gored a Taiwanese exchange student when she approached the animal to take a selfie.

Two men in the Ural Mountains were killed when they tried to take a selfie while holding a hand grenade with the pin removed.

While taking a selfie on railroad tracks, three Indian students were run over by an oncoming train.

In Mexico, a drunk man fatally shot himself while trying to take a selfie with a gun held to his head.

California doctors injected \$83,000 worth of antivenin into the arm of a San Diego man who had posed for a selfie holding a rattlesnake.

While driving to an alligator hunt, a Florida chiropractor filming himself with a video camera attached to a selfie stick collided with the vehicle in front of him, sending a boat through his windshield.

In North Carolina, a woman was killed in a head-on collision with a recycling truck just after posting a selfie and the comment, "The happy song makes me so HAPPY."

the rock, near the tree where he had hanged himself. Little by little I covered him with stones. I couldn't dig a hole to put him in because I didn't have a hoe, or a pick, or a mattock.

[Eschatology]

SILENT MAJORITY

From Portraits, by John Berger, which was published last month by Verso. A contributing editor of Harper's Magazine, Berger is the author of numerous books, including Ways of Seeing (1972).

There is no question that the living crowd the dead. And where the density of the living population is high, the dead cede ground. By contrast, there are other areas in the world, very thinly populated, where the dead assemble. Often these places are arid or poor. The deserts or the polar regions are the most extreme examples.

Many such areas prompted—indeed insisted on—a nomadic way of life. Further, as any shepherd or hunter will tell you, when you are wandering through certain lands, the paths themselves come toward you. You do not cross such a land like a railway line; you pursue, or are pursued by, its own paths. The land goes on and on. There are obstacles but no final barriers.

The Western Highlands of Scotland is an area like this. Everything is in transit, because there is nowhere to stop. The crofters' cottages crouch like animals sheltering on the ground for the night. There are encampments but no permanent assemblies. Everything advances—the larches, the bracken, the Caledonian pines, the heather, the juniper bushes, the scrub grass. Moving into the land is the water: the rivers going to the sea, the sea with its tides coming into the lochs. And, across both land and water, the wind. Sometimes there are wild geese, and their honking, as they fly, is like a fleeting measure, a counting in another algebra of all the land's movement.

This movement no more respects boundaries than did the fighting clans who once lived here; it mixes and confuses all. This is why herring can be fished from water surrounded by brackened hills. This is why on some days the sky appears to have more flesh on it, to be more hospitable, than the earth.

When you cross the Highlands going westward, you arrive at the Hebrides. Among the very



When the Desert Had Become like a City, a painting by Adam Lee, whose work is on view this month at BEERS London.

first islands is a small one, no more than seven miles long, called Gigha. The straits around Gigha are treacherous. Five hundred years ago, near the island's southern tip, the islanders built a chapel. It stood for three centuries, then fell into ruin. But around the chapel was a cemetery, and in this cemetery, after the collapse of the chapel, the dead continued to be buried, as they are still buried today.

The tombstones here record the deaths of several generations, including the name, the year of birth, the day of death, and the place of death, if it was not on the island. The only cause of death cited is drowning at sea.

A name and two dates, the last one precise to the very day. About what happened between, apart from the bare fact of survival, not a word. For that, no imaginable stone would be large enough, even for the shortest life; the largest quarry face would be too small to record the existence of a one-year-old child.

Then why any writing at all? Salt, rain, lichen, and wind efface the deepest-cut letters within a century or two.

The question might be asked in any cemetery where names are inscribed. But on Gigha the answer is more evident. The inscriptions are not for the living. (Those who will remember the dead have no need of a reminder.) The inscriptions are addressed to those whom the mourned one has now joined.

Into the ears of the rain the cut letters and numerals whisper; before the eyes of the wind they make signs.

From Gigha you look across to the straits, to the sea, to the sky above the sea, or in the opposite direction, to the brackened mountains beginning their next migration eastward. The sparsely inhabited coast of the continent here is shaped like the passage for a birth outward, a uterus leading toward the western horizon. And to this birthplace the nomadic dead have traveled. They are now within speaking distance in the cemetery.

Yet we did not know how to speak to them. We had to use the carved stones as go-betweens, supplying the names of those who had left us. Like this the dead did not have to be renamed, and like this we were a little reassured. ■

BOMBAST BURSTING IN AIR

The story, so far, of the 2016 election
By *Lewis H. Lapham*

We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.

—Louis Brandeis

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

—*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, directed by John Ford

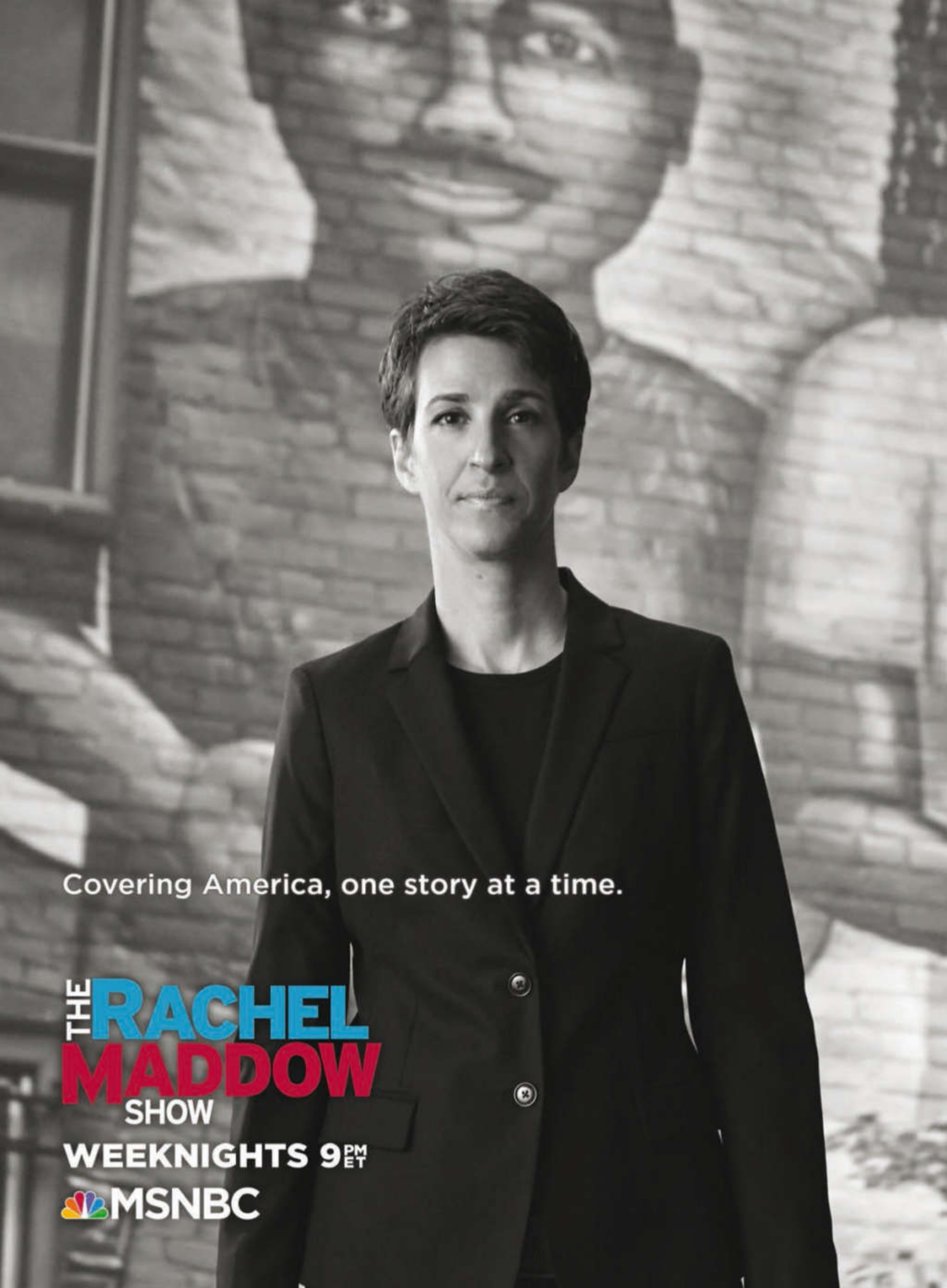
Between democracy and concentrated wealth the country throughout most of its history has preferred the latter to the former, the body politic asking only that the big money make a credible show of caring for something other than itself. For the past thirty-five years the modest requirement has been met with prolonged and costly stagings of a presidential-election campaign invariably said to be, as it was this past summer by Jeb Bush, “everybody’s test, and wide open—exactly as a contest for president should be.”

It is neither wide open nor, strictly speaking, a contest. It is a ritual reenactment of the legend of democracy as fairground spectacle: the proving that our flag is still there with star-spangled photo ops and bombast bursting in air, the candidates so well contrived that they can be presented as game-show contestants, mounted on selfie sticks until they come to judgment on Election Day before the throne of cameras by whom and for whom they are produced. The contrivances don’t come cheap. Luxury items made to the order and under the supervision of concentrated wealth, they can be counted upon, if and when elected, to stand, four-square and true blue, for the freedom of money, moralizing and vigilant against the freedoms of movement and thought. Names of candidates inclined to think or act otherwise won’t appear on the November ballot.

But why then, if the race is already come and gone, the pretense of a democratic running for the White House roses and the heavy spending for multicolored sound bites and dawn-to-dusk press coverage? The short answer comes from John Ford, the Hollywood director, whose movies called forth from the mist of heavily redacted memory the existence of a wide-open American frontier West that never was.

The longer answer is Plato’s in *The Republic*, his calling forth Socrates to explain that “noble falsehood” is the stuff that binds a society together in self-preserving myth. To the young aristocrat Glaucon preparing to become a ruler of Athens, Socrates says that the children of the city must be

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A black and white photograph of Rachel Maddow standing in front of a large mural of Martin Luther King Jr. She is wearing a dark blazer over a dark top. The mural is on a brick wall and shows a close-up of King's face with a slight smile.

Covering America, one story at a time.

THE **RACHEL**
MADDOW
SHOW

WEEKNIGHTS 9^{PM} ET

 **MSNBC**

WE ARE INVITED TO
UNDERSTAND GOVERNMENT AS
REPRESENTATIVE ONLY IN THE
THEATRICAL SENSE OF THE WORD

told that the god who made all of them mixed gold into the some of them “who are adequately equipped to rule, because they are the most valuable.”

Whether the intel is true or false matters less than the children’s remembering their duty to believe it, to know what their rulers would have them know.

In the American theater of operations the noble falsehood springs full-blown from the head of Abraham Lincoln declaring on the hallowed ground at Gettysburg in November 1863 “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Nowhere in the history of mankind does the record show a government so specified lasting longer than a few nasty, brutish, and short months; nor was such a government what the framers of the Constitution had in mind in Philadelphia in 1787. They envisioned a government in which a privileged few would arrange the distribution of law and property to and for the less fortunate many, an enlightened oligarchy that would nurture both the private and the public good, accommodating both the motions of the heart and the movements of a market. The balancing of the two sets of value they entrusted to a class of patrician overlords for whom, presumably, it was unnecessary to cheat and steal and lie, men like themselves, to whom Madison ascribed “most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society.”

But not enough wisdom and virtue to free the republic of its slaves. That task was left to men neither enlightened nor rich giving their “last full measure of devotion” to consecrate “the proposition that all men are created equal.” Lincoln’s poetic framing of the high resolve that these honored dead “shall not have died in vain” established the myth that in the years since has preserved the society from disunion, become the duty of the children to believe, of the rulers mixed with gold to teach.

Sound policy, but difficult to implement with a myth that has lost its power to enchant the populace and with presidential-election campaigns designed to be seen, not heard, the viewers invited to understand government as representative in the theatrical, not the constitutional, sense of the word. This simplified concept of politics installed Ronald Reagan in the White House in 1981 to represent the country’s preferred image of itself, uproot the democratic style of thought and feeling that underwrote Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, restore America to its rightful place where “someone can always get rich.” The business at hand was show business, the message up there in lights at the welcoming ceremony produced by Frank Sinatra at the Capital Centre in Landover, Maryland, on the night before Reagan’s inauguration. Seated onstage in overstuffed, throne-like armchairs, the president-elect and his wife graciously accepted the gifts of Hollywood frankincense and myrrh—Johnny Carson and Bob Hope cracking jokes, Charlton Heston standing in and up for Moses, James Stewart wearing the medals he won as an Air Force general, a clown performing in blackface, Sinatra himself singing “America the Beautiful.”

The evening set the tone of the incoming Republican political agenda, promising a happy return to an imaginary American past—to the amber waves of grain from sea to shining sea, the home on the range made safe from Apaches by John Wayne in John Ford’s *Stagecoach*. The great leap backward was billed as a bright new morning in an America once again cowboy-hatted and standing tall, risen from the ashes of defeat in Vietnam, cleansed of its Watergate impurities, outspending the Russians on weapons of mass destruction. During the whole of his eight years in office Reagan was near perfect in his lines—“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”—sure of hitting his marks on Omaha and Malibu Beach, snapping a sunny salute to a Girl Scout cookie or a nuclear submarine. The president maybe hadn’t read Plato in the ancient Greek, but myth was his métier, and he had the script by heart. Facts didn’t matter because, as he

was apt to say, “facts are stupid things.” What mattered was the warmth of Reagan’s bandleader smile, his golden album of red, white, and blue sentiment instilling consumer confidence in the virtuous virtual reality of an America that wasn’t there. The television cameras loved him; so did the voters. To this day he remains up there with Abraham Lincoln in the annual polls asking who was America’s greatest president.

The cameras also loved Bill Clinton, who modeled his presidency on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* rebooted to star himself as both bighearted celebrity host and shamefaced celebrity guest, reaching out at the top of the hour for more love and more cheeseburgers, after the commercial break dealing bravely with the paternity of the stains on Monica Lewinsky’s blue dress. He was admired not only for the ease with which he told smiling and welcome lies but also for his capacity to bear insult and humiliation with the imperturbable calm of a piñata spilling forth presidential largesse as corporate subsidy and tabloid scandal. Like Reagan, Clinton had been hired to hearten and amuse the country, not to govern it but to show that Justice spoilsport Brandeis had it wrong, that the true meaning of American exceptionalism is the not having to choose between democracy and concentrated wealth.

The Arkansas prom king and the Hollywood drum major didn’t make tedious distinctions between story and myth. The difference between what is and what is not was simply a matter of what was in or out of the camera shot, and during both their terms in office they were careful to preserve on camera the noble falsehood of a courageous and selfless democracy; off camera, they puffed up the pillows for a comfortable settling into place of what has become a selfish and frightened plutocracy. Their efforts were in keeping with the spirit of an age in which money was seen to be the hero with a thousand faces, greed the creative frenzy from which all blessings conspicuously flow. Stock-market values floated ever higher on the bubbles of ingenious speculation; so did the prices paid for flipping real estate. Credit was easy, and the cotton was high.

The restoring of America to its rightful place where “someone can always get rich” (not every someone, some of the someones connected to the right place at the right time) has resulted over the past thirty-five years in the awkward imbalancing of the values treasured by a capitalist economy and those cherished by a democratic society—more laws limiting the freedom of persons, fewer laws restraining the license of property, the letting fall into disrepair of nearly all the infrastructure that provides the country with the foundation of its common enterprise. The heavy tilt toward the reactionary right has been accompanied by the systematic juggling of the public land and light and air into the private purse; the formulation of a national-security state backed by the guarantee of never-ending foreign war and equipped with increasingly repressive police powers to still the waters of domestic discontent; the subdivision of America the Beautiful into a land of the rich and a land of the poor, to the point where 10 percent of the population holds 76 percent of the nation’s wealth—animal and virtual, vegetable, cultural, mineral, or intellectual.

Wonderful news for the dealers in high-end automotive and financial instruments, but a set of circumstances that presents a problem to the vendors of the 2016 presidential election: how sell Lincoln’s noble falsehood to the children of the city who have neither reason nor inclination to believe it? The sales pitch loses its force when the rulers of the city bend down to

THE CAMERAS LOVED BILL CLINTON, WHO STARRED AS BOTH BIGHEARTED CELEBRITY HOST AND SHAMEFACED CELEBRITY GUEST



THE 2016 DEMOCRACYLAND
PAGEANT IS EXPECTED TO COST
\$5 BILLION FOR THE PUBLICITY
AND THE BALLOONS



the electorate as if to a crowd of juvenile delinquents; deem the body politic incapable of generous impulse, selfless motive, or creative thought; deliver the insult with a headwaiter's condescending smile. How then expect the people to trust a government that invests no trust in them? Why the surprise that over the past thirty-five years the voting public has been giving ever-louder voice to its contempt for any and all politicians, no matter what their color, creed, prior arrest record, or sexual affiliation?

Proofs of government by the people, of the people, for the people are as rare upon the ground as sightings of the golden-cheeked warbler. The proposition that all men are created equal no longer wins the hearts and minds of America's downwardly mobile working classes—employed and unemployed, lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle, adjunct, and retired. Nor do the American people enjoy the privilege of direct participation in the naming of an American president. On Election Day they elect a slate of unknown persons to the Electoral College, their votes ignored if unaligned with the majority assigned to one or the other of two political parties. The rigged outcome relieves the rulers of the city of the duty to

address the children of the city as their fellow countrymen; they speak instead to the marketable demographics and target audiences—Americans distinguished not by the fact of being American but by the ancillary characteristics that reduce them to a commodity: gun-carrying American, female American, white American, gay American, African American, Hispanic American, Native American, swing-state American, Christian American, alienated American. The subordination of the noun to the adjective makes a mockery of the democratic premise and fosters the bitter separation of private goods, not the binding together of a public good.

Which is why the 2016 Democracyland pageant is expected to cost \$5 billion for the publicity and the balloons, up from \$2.6 billion in 2012. The democratic turn of mind and form of self-government having gone missing in plain sight, the sponsors of the 2016 election must deploy increasingly expensive virtual realities to make credible the show of the big money caring for something other than itself.

The campaign season begins with the ceremonial mixings of democratic clay with the aristocratic gold that makes the rulers of the city most valuable and therefore adequately equipped to rule. Money once again is the hero of the tale, called upon to judge the worth of a thing as the price of a thing, to rate the strength of the would-be nominees according to the cost of their manufacture. Like the weighing-in before a horse race or a boxing match, the ritual obliges the prospective champions of democratic freedom to set forth on vision quests within the kingdom of consecrated wealth, to bow and smile and

bend a knee, if necessary to crawl, before the various seats of power occupied by elite opinion in the political parties, and by the consortium of commercial interests (the banking, oil, communications, real-estate, and manufacturing industries) that constitute government of, by, and for the rich. The plutocracy is a nonpartisan equal-opportunity employer of folk-festival talent; its agencies and agents interview candidates of both parties applying for position in the White House, invite presentations at indoor banquets and outdoor barbecues, on conference calls or text messages, at a Colorado ski lodge or a California yacht basin.

On the go day and night, the would-be presidents of the United States parade like runway fashion models for the buyers of political product placement. On carpets mostly red but also blue, they walk, stare, pose

(with attitude); turn, smile, and wait to see who sends money and whither blows the wind that bestirreth the opinion polls. Made to be seen and not heard, banned from using words that might depress a Q Score, unsettle a Gallup poll, narrow a profit margin, the candidates run for the office of an edifying totem pole to stand and serve as America's preferred image of itself.

Occasionally they interrupt their schedule of private showings to deliver some sort of speech or statement to a street or stadium crowd, but their remarks don't attract the media's attention. What is of interest is the Easter-egg hunt in the gardens of important money, not the questions that might be of interest to citizens concerned about the terms and conditions under which they can exercise their right—God-given, but increasingly expensive—to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The punditry steers clear of the income-inequality issue, avoids the meaning of democracy as the why of who owes what to whom, and so we hear instead about PACs and super PACs, about pools of “dark money” drained of its pollutants by the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in favor of Citizens United, freely flowing in unlimited and anonymous amounts from the ghosts of Christmas yet to come. We learn that Hillary Clinton is Cinderella, who expects to fit \$2.5 billion into her glass slipper; that Jeb Bush, dynastic heir to fame and fortune, has more than \$100 million already well in hand; that Scott Walker enjoyed, before he dropped out after seventy-one days, the backing of the brothers Koch, billionaires said to have earmarked \$900 million to be scattered like baubles from a Mardi Gras parade float among Republican hopefuls able to quote from the Constitution as well as from the Bible. We learn that more than half the money has been collected from some 130 wealthy families, that many of the biggest donors live in the same buildings in New York and Houston, that Marco Rubio was given a sword named Chang by Jeb Bush and is supported by a billionaire car dealer in Miami, that Sheldon Adelson, billionaire statesman, has summoned candidates to his Las Vegas hotel and casino to examine their feelings about Israel.

During the fund-raising season the media ignored the failures on the part of the showroom models to give light and warmth to the noble falsehood embodied in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Some of them (most particularly Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush) were mixed with enough gold to serve as egalitarian figureheads on the prow of the plutocratic ship of state, but none of them were blessed with the talents of the drum major and the prom king. Nor were any of the other candidates at play in the fields of their landlord. A problem, but it had been a problem ever since Bill Clinton retired from the White House stage, and the media operatives in the big money's petting zoo were sure of their ability to fix it. The making of sows' ears into silk purses was what they were paid, and paid handsomely,

To achieve; why the bulk of the money raised for a presidential campaign deploys in advertising spots that cut and paste a human face on a block of wood or a pillar of salt.

he self-satisfied assumption didn't survive the stepping forward onto the political stage of Donald J. Trump, real-estate mogul, star of reality-show television, self-glorifying Jack of Diamonds and Ace of Spades. Mixed with his own gold, of a weight that he measures in tons, Trump doesn't do myth; myth is for losers. He does deals, “big deals” like those bragged about in his 2011 book, *Time to Get Tough*, deals that he'd been doing for years in high-stakes global finance, up against “hard-driving, vicious, cutthroat financial killers, the kind of people who leave blood all over the boardroom table.”

Trump declared his candidacy on June 16, a deus ex machina descending by escalator into the atrium of the Trump Tower on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, and there to say, and say it plainly, that Justice Brandeis had it right,

DONALD TRUMP, REAL-ESTATE
MOGUL AND STAR OF REALITY-TV
SHOWS, DOESN'T DO MYTH;
MYTH IS FOR LOSERS

TRUMP IS A SELF-PROMOTING
CLOWN, A BRAGGART IN
BOORISH VIOLATION OF THE
POLITICAL-CORRECTNESS CODES

democracy and concentrated wealth do not a happy couple make. Money is power, and power, ladies and gentlemen, is not self-sacrificing or democratic. The big money cares for nothing other than itself, always has and always will; it is the name of the game and the nature of the beast. Trump didn't need briefing books or policy positions to front an outdated noble falsehood. He embodied—live and in person—the proof of the proposition that he deemed it the duty of the children of the city to believe.

Trump established the bona fides of his claim to the White House on the simple but all-encompassing and imperishable truth that he was really, really rich, unbought and therefore unbossed, so magnificently rich that he was free to say whatever it came into his head to say, to do whatever it took to root out the corruption and stupidity in Washington, clean up the mess in the Middle East, or wherever else in the world ungrateful foreigners were neglecting their duty to do the bidding of the United States of America, the greatest show on earth, which deserved the helping hand of Trump, the greatest name on earth, to make it worthy of his signature men's colognes (Empire and Success) and set it free to fulfill the destiny emblazoned on his baseball cap: MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN.

Not the exact words in Trump's loud and thoughtless mouth, but the gist of the message that he shouted to the camera as June moved forward to July, Trump reminding all and sundry that the uplifting drivel about government of, by, and for the people wasn't worth a plug nickel, much less a wooden totem pole, even if carved in Aspen Institute scented pine or artisanal Heritage Foundation redwood. The dearly deluded children of the city swallowed the sugarcoated nonsense at their peril.

The message was received with cheering and applause everywhere Trump dropped by in his helicopter to walk amidst the popular loathing for the inside-the-Beltway politics and politicians settled on the nation's capital like a plague of locusts. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont had launched his campaign for the Democratic nomination on the same tide of populist anger and resentment, but he was an avowed socialist, and his muttering was to be expected and summarily dismissed by the big-money media because he wasn't mixed with gold and refused to beg for it in the marble halls of concentrated wealth.

But Trump was rich and therefore wise, a man who knew whereof he spoke, and he was being heard not only by the usual suspects in the Fox News time zones but also, *mirabile dictu*, by women and evangelicals, by young people not yet two-and-twenty, and at the end of July the greatest name on earth was perched atop the opinion-poll leaderboards.

For the mythographers organizing the Republican parade floats in the 2016 election pageant the sight was not a happy one, their confusion so complete that they didn't know how to read, much less tell, the story unfolding before their lying eyes. Hot air blowing up the wrong balloons, platitudes going down like tenpins, raindrops falling on everybody's head. Trump was worse than an embarrassment; he was a disaster, likely to roust out of the Republican Party any potential voters who weren't devout bigots. The man was a preposterous self-promoting clown, a vulgar lout, an unscripted canary flown from its gilded cage, a braggart in boorish violation of the political-correctness codes, referring to Mexicans (some Mexicans, not all Mexicans) as "criminals" and "rapists," questioning John McCain's credentials as a war hero ("I like people who weren't captured"), telling Megyn Kelly on Fox News that if from time to time he had been heard to describe women he didn't like as "dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals," he meant "only Rosie O'Donnell."

Although often and reprovingly repeated by the oracles in residence at both the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*, the objections weren't sustained by the opinion polls. Trump's numbers kept moving up, no mat-

ter how gross his displays of political incorrectness, or how obvious his lack of interest in, or knowledge of, the details of foreign and domestic policy. Other than the building of a wall along the Mexican border and the deportation of 11 million illegal aliens, he had little to say, specifically, about how or where or when he would get tough with the Chinese, handle the situation in Syria, make America great again.

Trump maybe was a brute, uncivil and unsafe, deserving to be removed at once from the sight of mother and the flag, thrown off John Wayne's stagecoach four miles west of nowhere, but his hold on the popular imagination attracted 24 million viewers to the first of the Republican debates, mounted by Fox News in the Quicken Loans Arena, on August 6. The protectors of the Republican Party's virtue hoped that one of the other nine candidates would topple Trump from his catbird seat, if not the slow and steady Jeb Bush (self-styled "joyful tortoise," mature and loving friend of the common man) then maybe Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, or Chris Christie, all of them rated by their touts as quick-witted, sharp-tongued, good at pretending that they cared about something other than themselves, able to find Aleppo on a map. During the summer of 2015, the collective attempt at Trump removal failed because the mogul didn't take the proffered bait, declined to do so with a sense of humor that his fellow candidates lack both the nerve and the permission to engage.

Between the first debate and the second, on September 16 (under the wing of Ronald Reagan's Air Force One in Simi Valley, California), Trump's poll numbers continued to rise despite the fond hopes of the Republican Party's spin doctors that his star would fade, wear out its welcome, pass and be forgotten with the rest. It didn't happen as expected at the second debate despite the concerted efforts of CNN's inspectors of souls to sink it below the horizon, and as of this writing (late September), it hasn't done so yet—for reasons that Trump, schooled in the savagery of reality TV, understands, and the moralizing punditry does not.

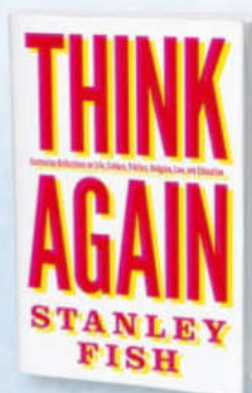
The camera sees but doesn't think, makes no meaningful distinction between a bubble bath in Santa Monica staffed by pretty girls and a bloodbath on a beach in Libya staffed by headless corpses. The return on investment in both instances is the flow of bankable emotion, in unlimited and anonymous amounts, drawn from the dark and bottomless pools of human wish and dream. The cameras following Trump's political campaign aren't covering a set or a play of ideas; they are attracted, like flies to death and honey, to the sweet, decaying smell of big-name celebrity. It doesn't matter what Trump says or doesn't say, whether he is cute and pink or headless; what matters is that Trump is a profitable return on investment in idols of the marketplace, up there onstage with Princess Di, Silvio Berlusconi, and Ronald Reagan.

Trump doesn't do myth, because celebrity, of, in, and for itself, is noble falsehood. The camera doesn't do democracy because democracy is the holding of one's fellow citizens in respectful regard, not because they are beautiful or rich or famous but because they are one's fellow citizens, and it is therefore worth knowing what they do and say. A camera addresses a valued customer, not a valuable citizen, substitutes for the rule of law the rule of men, men as images so graven in gold that, like the Phrygian king Midas, they lose the freedom of movement and thought.

Politics as spectacle meets the plutocratic temper of the times. The electorate over the past forty years has been taught to believe that the future can be bought instead of made, and the active presence of the citizen has given way to the passive absence of the consumer. A debased electorate asks of their rulers what the rich ask of their servants—comfort us, tell us what to do. The wish to be cared for replaces the will to act, the spirit of freedom trumped by the faith invested in a dear leader. The camera doesn't lend itself to democracy, but if it's blind to muddy boots on common ground, it gazes adoringly at polished boots mounted on horseback. ■

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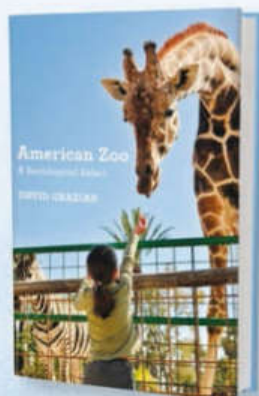
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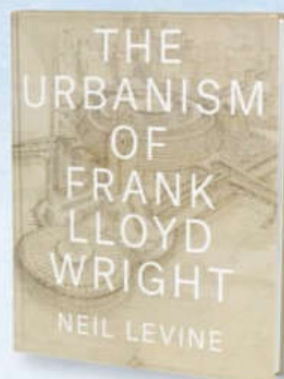
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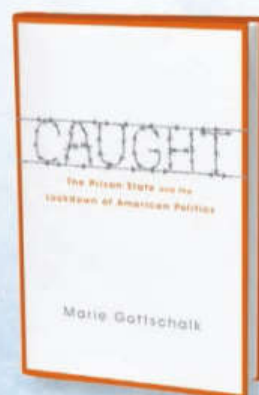
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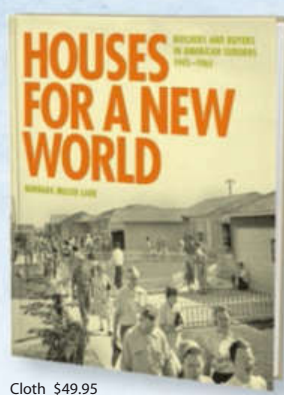
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THE NEW CHINA SYNDROME

How Beijing shakes down foreign businesses

By Barry C. Lynn

It's May Day, and a rambunctious crowd of well-dressed people, many carrying blue and yellow parasols, has pushed into a Ford dealership just north of Chongqing, China. Mist from a car wash catches the sun, and I watch a man in a striped shirt poke at the gleaming engine of a midsize Mondeo while his wife sits in the driver's seat and turns the wheel. Overhead, a giant banner of a Mustang painted Communist Party red ripples in the spring breeze.

At the showroom door, I am greeted by three saleswomen who smile and stare, clearly shocked to see a Westerner. Finally, a manager leads me over to a young man, the resident expert in English. Other than the Ford logo and the corporate mantra of the moment, *GO FURTHER*, the front of his card is entirely in Mandarin. He carefully pronounces his name for me: Yi Xuanbo. Then he leads me past a potted rubber plant to a small aluminum table and hands me a paper cup of tea.

Yi places a luxurious brochure on the table and flips to a picture of a silver Mondeo hovering over the Manhattan skyline. He then turns to a page extolling the interior and the sound system—in English, the accompanying text describes the car as “a sensory palace.” Yi tells me how much a basic Mondeo costs before taxes: 179,800 yuan, or about \$28,000. I ask him whether he owns a Ford and he shakes his head, but with a smile. “I think maybe next year, I can buy one, too.”

For Ford executives, this scene might offer a welcome testimonial to their decision, in 2012, to dramatically increase investment in China. And Chongqing, a municipality of almost 30 million people in the center of the country, is key to their vision. The cars on display at the dealership I visited are manufactured only a few miles away, at Ford's main Chinese factory complex. If you take the subway eleven stops from the dealership to the Changfulu station, you can stand on the elevated platform and stare out over a shimmering desert of industrial roofing, which covers several million square feet of assembly lines.

Ford has pledged to do for China in the coming century what it did for America in the previous one, which is to produce vast quantities of high-quality cars that the masses can afford—even the company's own salesmen. The bet is paying off. In 2014, only two years after committing big money, Ford sold more than a million cars in China, almost as many as it sold in the United States.

For any American who has followed domestic debates over international trade, Ford's success in China—as well as that of General Motors and Chrysler—must be especially gratifying. Ever since the Japanese mounted the first major postwar challenge to American industrial preeminence, in the 1980s, the ability to sell U.S.-branded cars abroad has

Barry C. Lynn's most recent article for Harper's Magazine, "Killing the Competition," appeared in the February 2012 issue. He directs the Open Markets Program at New America, in Washington, D.C.

served as the prime test of the fairness of any given trading relationship. Japan itself has failed this test for the past three decades, keeping its automotive market mostly closed to foreign brands. In China, however, Fords, Chevrolets, Cadillacs, and Jeeps have been roaring off dealers' lots—largely at the expense of Japanese automakers.



This success might also appear to validate something more important than corporate canniness. Two decades ago, in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, a group of libertarian intellectuals in America put forth a radical vision: Lift all controls on the industrial and financial companies of the West, set them free to manage the world's trade without any strangulating regulations, and they would entice the People's Republic of China to join the international system. This would produce, in the words of Bill Clinton, who ardently embraced such thinking, a "more open and free China." It would also lead to wider prosperity for all.

But outside the Ford showroom, as I watch two children run laughing among the sparkling new vehicles, I wonder whether this great experiment in what we have been taught to call globalization really did work as promised. As our biggest manufacturers and traders and in-

vestors succeed in China, they also come to depend on China for future profits—which brings them increasingly under the sway of a Chinese state that holds the power to cut those profits off. What if the master capitalists and corporate bosses who have so cowed us here at home are themselves being cowed in Beijing? What if the extreme economic interdependence between the United States and China is not actually carrying our values into a backward and benighted realm, but accomplishing precisely the opposite—granting the Chinese Politburo ever-increasing leverage over America's economic and political life?

This may seem an odd moment to sound the alarm about China. In the past few months, we have seen the near collapse of the country's stock market, the devaluation of its currency, and the sputtering of its mighty industrial sector. But long term, the picture has hardly changed. China will soon pass the United States to become the world's largest economy; by some measures, it has done so already. Wages and consumption remain strong, the service and online-retail sectors are hot, and vast portions of the population have yet to buy their first car or iPhone. All of which is to say that China, however challenged, remains as attractive a market as ever for many corporations.

This also means that basic patterns of behavior are unlikely to change anytime soon, and many of China's recent actions are disturbing in the extreme. Consider its growing bellicosity in Asia. Over the past couple of years, Beijing has unilaterally declared an "air-defense identification zone" over most of the East China Sea, parked a drilling rig off Vietnam, encouraged fleets of fishing boats to anchor around islets long claimed by Japan, and built entirely new islands on reefs claimed by the Philippines. The expansionist itch has been so reckless, so assertive, that Japan's prime minister recently compared China to Germany circa 1914.

What we have largely missed, though, is the emergence of a similar bellicosity within China, directed not at other nations but at foreign corporations operating inside its borders. When American corporations succeed in China, the result is not a mutual sense of comfort and familiarity, such as Toyota now enjoys in the United States. Instead we see a tightening of control, and increasing efforts to bend these powerful commercial institutions to the will of the men who run the Chinese state.

Rio Tinto, the world's number-two supplier of iron, was among the first targets of this approach. In 2010, global prices for metals were spiking, and China's state-owned steel mills pressed the corporation for a discount rate on

iron ore. Rio Tinto refused—and meanwhile began selling ore to a few privately owned mills in the country. In response, Beijing simply charged four executives in the company's Shanghai office, including an Australian citizen, with capital crimes. The tactic seems to have worked. While the four sat petrified in a Shanghai courthouse that March, Rio Tinto CEO Tom Albanese was in Beijing to, as one journalist put it, pay “homage to China's leaders.” A couple of weeks later, a deal was struck on the pricing of iron ore.

Another early target was Walmart. In October 2011, authorities in Chongqing charged the corporation, which at that time controlled some 10 percent of China's hypermarket sales, with mislabeling pork products. Let's recall that Walmart was (and is) the world's largest company in terms of revenue. This didn't discourage the Chinese from jailing two of Walmart's employees, putting seven more under house arrest, and closing all of its outlets in Chongqing for two weeks.

What made the intervention especially telling was where it took place, and when. Chongqing is one of four cities in China directly controlled by the central government, which means the decision to target the U.S. company likely carried the imprimatur of the Politburo. The action also coincided with the publication of a long article in *The Atlantic* that purported to show how Walmart was cleaning up China's food supply chain by fighting “pollution, adulterated foods, [and] corruption.” HOW WALMART CONQUERED CHINA, read the headline on the magazine's cover. In one stroke, Chinese officials made clear exactly whose practices needed cleaning up, and who had conquered whom.

Some observers believe that Chinese authorities target foreign corporations merely for mercenary ends. Their goal, this thinking holds, is to grab patents for Chinese companies, or to shake a little cash into national or personal coffers. These quiet aggressions often do result in measurable commercial advances. Beijing held up Glencore's takeover of Xstrata, an Anglo-Swiss mining operation, until executives agreed to transfer control of a lucrative Peruvian copper mine to a Chinese company. A lawsuit against InterDigital, which manages a vast portfolio of wireless patents, led that corporation to grant special treatment to Chinese enterprises. Litigation against the chipmaker Qualcomm had a similar effect, and in that instance Beijing tacked on a \$975 million fine.

But the Chinese increasingly appear to aim at more direct forms of control over foreign companies. In China, there is no independent judiciary, no rule of law, no real property rights, and certainly no corporate “free speech” rights. Hence one way for Chinese functionaries to

control a foreign enterprise is simply to habituate its executives to the lash of arbitrary power masquerading as law.

Just about any law can serve the purpose. Last year, Beijing used anticorruption statutes to fine the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline nearly \$500 million. The year before, the tool of choice was a new antimonopoly law, which Beijing wielded during a sort of mass shaming of foreign executives. Functionaries from the National Development and Reform Commission reportedly summoned in-house lawyers from some thirty companies, including GE, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Siemens, and Samsung. Once everyone was in the room, officials announced that half the companies present were already under investigation for monopoly crimes—but didn't say which. According to the Reuters journalist who broke the story, the officials

AFTER A FRENZY OF CRITICISM, APPLE CEO TIM COOK PROMISED CHINESE CUSTOMERS A “PROFOUND REFLECTION” ON HIS COMPANY'S POLICIES

instructed the managers to write down public “self-criticisms,” a Maoist practice designed to coerce individuals into confessing wrongdoing in advance of any trial. A Chinese regulator made the consequences clear: if any company resisted, he might double or triple its fine.

This predilection for mass shaming is not confined to the boardroom. In recent years, China's state-run television station, CCTV, has produced what is known as the 315 Gala—an annual “consumer-rights program” in which the hosts finger foreign companies for their bad behavior. Hewlett-Packard, Starbucks, and McDonald's have all taken turns in the dock. In 2013, one of the main targets was Apple. At first, the world's most valuable corporation refused to flinch. But after the *People's Daily* and other state-owned media orchestrated another frenzy of criticism, Apple CEO Tim Cook delivered a formal apology to Chinese consumers, promising them a “profound reflection” on the company's repair and warranty policies.

Before we rush to excoriate the Chinese for interfering with private business, we should remember that for most of our own history, we in America have done much the same thing. Here, too, country has long trumped company.

A relatively recent myth argues otherwise. It holds that Americans have always allowed actors in the economy to do exactly as they

pleased, without any form of regulation, and that the result of this laissez-faire policy was a nation glorious and grand. There is no truth to this myth. From the first, the founding generation recognized that the only way to achieve real liberty for the individual was to use the power of the state to prevent the infringement of that liberty, be it at the hands of the private monopolist at home or the mercantilist abroad.

Henry Adams captured this paradox in his *History of the United States During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*. No American has ever decried government power more eloquently than Jefferson. But on taking office, on the cusp of the Napoleonic Wars, Jefferson confronted a world in which most trade was micromanaged by London or Paris. His response? He threatened to divert vital goods

JEFFERSON'S GOALS WERE IDEALISTIC; HIS
MEANS, COERCIVE. IN PLACE OF MILITARY
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from one European power to another, as a way of guaranteeing the independence of American traders—and, more important, of the nation itself. The United States at the time was a small country, so this initial effort had limited effect. But looking ahead, Jefferson imagined a day when the president's power to regulate foreign commerce would serve, in Adams's words, as "the machinery for doing away with navies, armies, and wars." The goal was idealistic; the means, coercive. In place of military power, America would use trade power.

So it continued for the next century and a half. The industrial tariffs of the Republicans, the reciprocal-trade concepts of Progressive Era Democrats, the federal government's structuring of companies such as RCA after the First World War—all were intended to ensure that the U.S. business community did what Washington considered necessary for the nation's security. Perhaps the most dramatic example was the trading regime that the United States imposed on Europe and Japan after 1945. The goal, again, was utopian: an international economic system organized, in the words of a leading historian of the Marshall Plan, to make war "materially impossible" by making nations industrially interdependent. But the means were entirely realist. The U.S. government, along with its allies in Europe and Japan, determined which corporations did business where, how, and with whom. By doing so, it also kept real

limits on how much the United States depended on any other nation.

Throughout most of the postwar era, no one pretended that the international economy was anything other than a system of political power. The turning point came with the triumph of modern libertarianism, with its sophisticated, Orwellian method of hiding corporate power behind the rhetoric of individual liberty. The key thinker, as with so many libertarian schemes, was Milton Friedman. In *Free to Choose* (1980), Friedman likened regulation of trade to "masochism and sadism." He described the world economy not as a system deliberately constructed to promote stability and peace while distributing prosperity, but as a "world market" regulated by the infallible law of supply and demand.

Even today, Friedman's writings give off a slight hippie vibe, with free trade sounding suspiciously like free love. Yet hidden behind the author's beatific smile was a specific and very pragmatic goal: to get Washington out of the business of governing international commerce so that the managers of private corporations could take over instead.

Ronald Reagan is widely viewed as the chief votary of the libertarians, and in matters of domestic corporate policy, he certainly heeded Friedman's views. But when it came to trade, Reagan stuck to traditional Jeffersonian principles. The state must retain ultimate control. Dependence on foreign nations must be avoided. Never did Reagan prove this more robustly than when he used trade and monetary policy to quash Japanese efforts to dominate such industries as cars and semiconductors.

It was not until 1993 that Friedman found a true acolyte in the White House. When Bill Clinton took office, he moved with remarkable swiftness to shore up the power of private corporations—especially when it came to trade. By 1994, he had negotiated and signed an agreement that shifted the regulation of America's commerce from the people's government in Washington to the corporate-dominated World Trade Organization. By 2000, he had succeeded in winning permanent most-favored-nation trading status for China. In tandem, the two acts effectively gave a few corporations free rein to manage our trade with the autocratic regime in China.

No matter how Clinton and his advisers may have chosen to depict their actions, these were not naïve men. The Clinton White House fully accepted that America would need to exert real and punishing power abroad. To that end, they upheld the military strategy concocted by Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney in 1992, whose primary mandate was that "no rival" must ever again emerge to challenge American arms. Together, the decisions to surrender America's

trade power while buttressing America's military power added up to a radical overthrow of this country's republican traditions. Worse, they left our nation unable to defend itself or its allies against the trade power of predatory foreign nations.

It's hard to feel sorry for the executive of a multinational corporation. Sure, she must swap the amusements of Cincinnati and Dallas for the discomforts of Singapore and Geneva—but expat salaries, chauffeured cars, live-in maids, and private schools help ease the pain. And if she must sometimes jet from Shanghai to Berlin to São Paulo, she will at least find a gauntlet of obsequious servers proffering hot towels, cold drinks, and aromatic spa treatments to ease the way. Yet sit down with Jeremie Waterman, who directs China policy at the United States Chamber of Commerce in Washington, and you may find yourself feeling a bit weepy about the travails of today's corporate leaders—at least those who work in China.

When I first ask Waterman about Beijing's treatment of American companies, he stares at me, as if unsure how to respond. Then he shakes his head. When a U.S. corporation does business in China, he says, its executives are “going up against the whole system—the courts, the companies, the regulators, the government.” For a growing number of firms, even giants like Boeing, day-to-day business increasingly means striving “to please the Chinese government and the Communist Party.”

Waterman and I don't bother to discuss why executives at American corporations would so readily expose themselves to the power of the Chinese state. To anyone in the business community, the answers are self-evident. First is the fact that so many U.S. companies now depend on China for the products they sell. For Walmart, it's barbecue grills and shoes. For Apple, it's assembly work. For Pfizer, it's chemicals. And while foreign companies have talked a lot about reducing their reliance on China, they nevertheless keep upping the ante, year after year. Just last April, General Motors announced plans to pour another \$16 billion into China. In September, Dell pledged a whopping \$125 billion over the next five years, with an ominous promise to “closely integrate Dell China strategies with [Chinese] national policies.”

A second reason corporations are so willing to accede to Chinese diktats is the allure of Chinese markets. For General Motors, China already accounts for roughly a third of the cars it sells. For Qualcomm, China accounts for roughly half its business. For Rio Tinto, China accounts for considerably more than half its output of iron ore. Chinese sales of Apple's

iPhones topped U.S. sales in 2015—and when global markets were tanking in late August, Tim Cook helped arrest a rout in the company's stock by publicly assuring investors that the Cupertino giant had “continued to experience strong growth for our business in China through July and August.”

A handful of U.S. companies have avoided exposing themselves to Chinese control, sometimes at great cost. In March 2010, in response



to growing censorship and a surprisingly sophisticated hack, Google redirected Chinese- and English-language searches from the mainland to servers in Hong Kong. Beijing responded by temporarily cutting off access to Google's search engine and, more recently, to Gmail. The cost to Google? Access to the world's largest market of Web users, 649 million strong and growing.

The story is much the same with the *New York Times*. In October 2012, the paper published an article detailing how the family of former premier Wen Jiabao had accumulated more than \$2 billion in assets by taking advantage of the “intersection of government and business.” Chinese authorities responded by blocking domestic access to the paper's Chinese-language website and refused to provide visas to its reporters. Despite being cut off from millions of

potential readers and seeing a key bureau hobbled, the *Times* has not budged.

But absent any coherent and countervailing pressure from the U.S. government, most companies have continued with business as usual, no matter what Beijing demands. The overall result, in almost every sector of the U.S. economy, is a deeper and deeper dependence on China for both labor and cash.

Hollywood, too, has learned to bow and scrape. There's a delicious irony here: for decades, Americans assumed that one of the surest ways to export liberal values was on 35-mm film. But that was before China got on a path to become the movie industry's largest market by 2018. And that was before a Chinese billionaire used Chinese state money to assemble the biggest chain of cinemas in the world, including AMC Theatres in the United States. And that was before Chinese moguls became top investors in American-made films. One result is that we now get to watch history being rewritten before our eyes. It was, for example, the Chinese army that in 2007 fired a missile into an old weather satellite, triggering a debris storm that threatened other satellites. By 2013, when the story made it to the big screen in *Gravity*, the oafish deed had been pinned on today's stock villains, the Russians.

That the Chinese company Shuanghui, which in 2013 purchased America's biggest pig processor, Smithfield, is now apparently using Smithfield's lobbying power to rewrite state laws in Nebraska is not surprising. What we must now get our heads around is that Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, though based in New York, are not all that different a case. These bankers have for years profited by serving as procurers for Chinese investors who long to get their hands on American technologies and other assets. Their real interest nowadays? To subject their companies even more directly to Chinese influence by, as Morgan Stanley bluntly put it, hiring the "sons and daughters" of China's sitting rulers.

Democracies tend to approach empire differently than autocracies. People in democracies typically want other people to embrace their ways, not merely to yield to them at gunpoint. And so the empire Americans built after the Second World War was in fundamental respects unlike those of other modern powers. To be sure, we regularly used military muscle to shape the world—and often made a hash of it. Yet when we reverted to Jeffersonian principles and used our trade power, as we did with the Marshall Plan in Europe and the Kennedy Round of trade liberalization, the frequent result was peace, prosperity, and liberty.

Geir Lundestad, the former head of the Nobel Peace Prize committee and one of Europe's most celebrated historians of U.S. power, notes that imperial America has been "much more comfortable with spontaneity and self-organization than earlier great powers." Indeed, for much of the past half-century, Washington's approach to the world was not unlike the president's approach to Congress: alternately pleading, horse trading, and whipping. Americans cajoled allies and built coalitions, developed clubs and fostered interests, then used our global trade power to orchestrate the whole enterprise.

What never occurred to us was that another state might rise to inhabit the global trade system we built. Or that the leaders of this other state might learn how to manipulate the same corporate and financial levers that our own leaders have long manipulated. Now, suddenly, Washington is rife with suspicion that China is playing a very different game from the one our leaders imagined when they dreamed their libertarian dreams twenty years ago. This suspicion undergirds Obama's vaunted Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which, at least in theory, aims to peel some commerce away from China. It explains the Pentagon's shift of troops and ships to Asia to buttress allies such as Japan and the Philippines, who suddenly find themselves the target of Chinese aggression. And it lies at the heart of a recent Council on Foreign Relations paper warning of China's threat to "U.S. primacy in Asia."

In the run-up to last summer's vote on fast-track negotiating authority for the TPP, President Obama warned that what is now at stake is who gets to "write the rules for trade in the twenty-first century." What America's political class and security establishment have yet to realize is that in a world in which nations are intertwined by global corporations, there is something else at stake: who gets to write the rules for liberty here in America. The difference between traditional American hegemony and Chinese hegemony cannot be overstated. When the United States wielded power over corporations in the postwar era, our overarching goal was—with some notable exceptions—stability, peace, and prosperity. When China wields its power over foreign corporations, the ultimate goal is—always—command and control.

In late April, I wait on a bench in the ground-floor offices of a Manhattan startup. Soon a wry-eyed man in his mid-forties walks up, shakes my hand, and leads me through a high-ceilinged room crammed with blond desks, cheap sofas, and trim young men and women hunched over Apple monitors. Outside, a stiff breeze off the Hudson bends the daffodils

double. But the stuffy room where we sit down to talk is windowless, its walls adorned with memos and jottings from previous meetings.

The informal setting is deceptive. My host knows as much as anyone about the role of business in the relationship between the United States and China, having spent years establishing the Chinese operations of one of America's largest corporations, then working a stint for the government in Washington. He is now involved in a variety of high-tech enterprises, which accounts for his insistence on anonymity.

He regards me warily at first, and answers my questions with brief, noncommittal sentences. But after a few minutes, he suddenly leans forward, as if someone has flicked a switch, and the words spill out. It's almost as if he is confessing, his face alternately expressing anger and shame and relief.

His story follows what I have come to realize is a standard trajectory of disillusionment for midlevel American executives in China. In this case, it started in 2004, when he was dispatched to Shanghai and Beijing to investigate whether and how his firm should invest in China. Like most American executives during those days, he assumed it was an opportunity to earn good money while doing good work, in the form of liberalizing China's autocratic system—or, as he put it, to “create greater room for speech and innovation.”

Those expectations were dashed the moment he began to interact with the government. “I would like to say that we negotiated with the Chinese,” he tells me. “But that implies give-and-take.”

More disturbing, he said, was the realization that his company could not trust its new Chinese employees. In any business venture, there is always competition among members of the team. The difference in China, he says, is that employees were angling less to serve their own interests than those of hidden masters. “We realized that the loyalties of many of our employees were entirely split. Even if they had the best of intentions, even if they really wanted to drag China into a more open and democratic era, they were still under immense personal pressure to serve the state.”

After a couple of years on the ground, my host concluded that succeeding in China would dictate various forms of personal compromise. “The more entangled you are with China economically, the more subject you are to their power, to their ways of getting you to do things.” Most demoralizing, he says, was the sense of becoming complicit in such an abusive system. Eventually he recommended that his employer pull out of China. The company's

board decided otherwise, and soon thereafter, he left the firm.

I ask him whether the American business community is naïve about its role in China, and he squints at me, as if I'd asked the wrong question. Then he half-smiles. “We are at a tipping point where we are no longer in control.”

It has become conventional wisdom that George W. Bush's war in Iraq was the greatest strategic blunder in American history. And certainly there's a good case to be made. The needless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. The political destabilization of an entire region. The myopic disdain for allies and compromise. And that was all before Bush's bastard child, the Islamic State, learned to walk and stalk.

Yet the Clinton White House's derangement of trade policy in the 1990s now poses far graver dangers to the security of the United States and its citizens. Not only did the administration abandon the precept that America must not depend on any other nation. Not only did the administration unilaterally discard the trade power with which Americans had wrought such wonders. Clinton also violated the most important rule of the postwar international system: that we trade liberally only with democracies. The result? We, along with our allies, are now caught in the grasp of one of the most sophisticated, resilient, and forward-looking autocracies in the history of the world.

It is impossible to tell how China will pull these strings. Perhaps one day soon Beijing will threaten to cut off basic supplies of drugs and electronics, in an attempt to sweep our ships and troops from the Pacific. (To understand this ploy, Chinese leaders would need only study the actions of President Eisenhower in 1956, when he drove the armies of Britain and France from the Suez by threatening to cut off supplies of money and oil.) The more likely scenario, however, is less dramatic. Given America's almost moribund federal authority over trade, China is largely free to manipulate the greed and cowardice of our corporate leaders, in ways that every day concentrate more control in their own hands. The national interest? Only a cacophony of interests manipulated from afar, like France in the days just before Vichy.

Is there any hope of reversing this sorry trend? Of course—if we move immediately to put country above company, and to restore the systems of checks and balances we used for two centuries to distribute power safely at home and abroad. But to do so, we must first understand that Beijing, however terrifying, is not our immediate enemy. To regain our liberty, we must first target the oligarchs in our midst. In tearing down the fences to gain more absolute liberty for themselves, it was they who let in the wolf. ■



LOST GIRLS

Women, sex, and the Arab Spring
By Sarah Dohrmann

Meriem became a prostitute because she lost her virginity. She told me this in a house that I was renting in a Moroccan seaside town. It was 2008 and I had just moved there from Fez because the words people used to describe the place were *belle* and *tranquille*. Europeans owned homes in the Old City, which they occupied in the summer, when the town was saturated in blue and the beach looked savage and grand. The rest of the year, you saw vacant homes and hungry people and heroin addicts.

Seated on my sofa, Meriem narrated her life story.* I stopped her on occasion to be sure I wasn't misunderstanding her Moroccan Arabic. "Your childhood boyfriend raped you?" I asked. I repeated the word she had used, which I assumed meant "rape." She nodded while I looked it up in my dictionary, but *rape* wasn't there.

I tried a different tack. "You're saying he forced you to have sex with him?" She nodded, sipping her coffee. Then she shook her head. "No," she said, "we were friends." I offered her a cigarette. She got a phone call and started arguing with the person on the other end. Then she started

* Some names and identifying details have been changed.

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crying. She was saying, "I want to live in Spain, Mama. I don't want to live in Morocco anymore."

I noticed that her fingernails had been chewed to nubs and that she had a bruise on her right knee. It was unusual that I could see her knees at all. Indeed, in that first half hour with Meriem, I could almost forget that we were in Morocco and that she wasn't "good" by Moroccan standards. She was smoking one of my cigarettes; she wasn't wearing a headscarf; she was exposing her legs. Walking over to my house, she hadn't even covered her outfit with a *djellaba*, the traditional hooded cloak.

It was Taha, a friend of a friend, who had introduced me to Meriem. Although I had come to Morocco on a grant to study contemporary Francophone women's writing, I had also begun to learn *Darija*—another name for Moroccan Arabic, the colloquial language that incorporates bits of Berber, French, and Spanish. There were no academics in the town, and I didn't want to be tutored by a man. Meriem is a prostitute, Taha had told me, but she's very smart. I said that I didn't care what she did when she wasn't tutoring me. And anyway, it was the kind of language not found in books that I most wanted to learn.

In Fez, I had practiced dialogues that adhered to Morocco's traditional

gender roles: *Fatima cooks in the kitchen, while Mohammed sits at the café*. My tutor there, an unmarried and conservative woman, punctuated my classroom dialogues with instruction on what good Moroccan women did or did not do. To be seen as good was plainly imperative, which left me at a disadvantage. I wasn't Muslim, I wasn't married, I wasn't a virgin, I lived alone. And I had desires. It seemed impossible for me to befriend good Moroccan women, but I also didn't want to feel alone.

Meriem taught me: *Siir t'Haowa, mEa kht'k Seloua!* Go get fucked with your sister Seloua!

I used the phrase only once. It was a hot spring day. I saw a young man walking toward me from afar; as he approached, his gait shifted to a swagger. He could very well have been the same man who'd passed a minute earlier, or two minutes before that. In Morocco, the catcall-to-minute ratio was approximately one to one.

I'd grown skilled at controlling what I saw as I walked: not the catcalling men, but the swallows circling the gates of the Old City as dusk fell, or the tiny seashells embedded in the pavement. This time I focused on an approaching patch of shade—but damn, this man! He placed himself in my path, and at the last moment stopped right in

front of me. He smiled and licked his chops. “*Salut, ma belle!*” he said. “*Ça va?*” I told him to get fucked with his sister Seloua, and turned away.

Maybe I had it coming. I was, after all, wearing a black dress cut at the knee. I’d been on my way to a concert at the French Consulate in Tangier, wearing ankle boots and carrying black high heels in my handbag,

of El Minzah, the most luxurious hotel in town, and gave me his card. “You will call me if you need anything?” he said. “Yes,” I said, though I couldn’t conceive of a single thing I would need from the manager of El Minzah.

The concert started. A friend of mine was performing. She sang songs in Hebrew while two other women sang in Spanish and Arabic. There was a man who played the violin

worker, I can’t remember which. We spoke to each other in French; with the waiters, I spoke *Darija* and he spoke Modern Standard Arabic. I was embarrassed to be with a man who spoke Modern Standard Arabic to waiters. It seemed stuffy to me, but his only other option was French, which had its own negative connotations in Morocco.

After dinner we went to a bar, and then to a club, and then to a strip of



I had just finished a three-hour online chat with a man in New York. We’d spoken of his impending visit, of sex. I felt reckless and beautiful in my dress as I made my way to the town’s thrown-together bus station.

When I arrived in Tangier, I hailed a *petit taxi* to the consulate. The hall was almost empty when I entered, leaving me to my thoughts of the chat. I imagined the man’s hands reaching under my dress in a hotel room, the view from our balcony overlooking the port, the distant sound of a ship’s horn reverberating in our room. Then a group of men in suits sat down behind me. One began talking to me as if it were nothing at all—as if we were friends and he knew what I had on my mind. He said he was the manager

while the three women sang folk songs and prayers, and my friend played the harp. Their songs sounded like pleas. Afterward, I walked to the veranda to smoke a cigarette. The lawn outside the veranda was a dense green smear, and beyond the glade was a high white wall with a rash of bougainvillea clinging to it. I could hear the shouts and car horns of Tangier on the other side.

A Frenchman joined me. He was tall, with boyish curls and a sideways smile. By then I was on my second gin and tonic. He asked if I would like to have dinner with him and I said yes. We left the consulate and walked up a hill to a small restaurant that served wine. He told me about his Turkish girlfriend, who was either a concert pianist or a human-rights

clubs on the beach. I took off my heels to walk barefoot in the sand. The Frenchman might have kissed me then.

He was staying at El Minzah. I remember the long hallways, the carpets and candle sconces. He took two Heinekens out of his minifridge. We lay on the bed fully clothed and fell asleep.

The next morning I awoke to the telephone ringing—ringing and ringing, on and on, until I finally answered. A woman was on the other end. “Who is this?” she wanted to know. I hung up. “Your girlfriend just called,” I said.

The phone rang again. “Shit,” the Frenchman said. He answered, sat on my side of the bed with his head in his hands, lit a cigarette, and tried to

convince the woman that the front desk had patched her in to the wrong room. “No, darling, there’s no woman here.” He took the phone into the bathroom. My head was pounding. After some time he came back to the bed, replaced the phone on the nightstand, and lit another cigarette. “You smoke too much,” I said. The phone rang again as he took off my black dress and kissed me. Later, we stood on the street in front of the hotel. I was wearing my boots again; the heels were in my handbag. He was on his way to the airport. He told me he was sorry that he couldn’t take me out for breakfast before returning to Paris. I said it was all right. He gave me his card.

When I spoke *Darija* to Moroccans, even badly, they often took me into their confidence. It made me different from the Westerners who came to buy property and stayed for years without ever learning a word of the language. Some viewed me with suspicion, as a possible CIA operative; others pitied me. Luckily, pity went a long way in Morocco. From taxi drivers, concerned neighbors, teachers, and newfound friends, I received frequent unsolicited advice on how not to be confused for a prostitute. The lessons were delivered so often that I came to see the issue as a national obsession.

If you smoke cigarettes in public, people will think you are a prostitute. Do not put lipstick on in public, not even lip balm. Don't put anything on your face in public at all. Don't overly wax your eyebrows—you can have them waxed, but not too waxed. See? Don't sit on the ground. Don't spread your legs even a tiny bit while sitting and especially not while sitting on the ground. Don't chew gum in a solicitous manner. Don't chew gum at all. Don't go to nightclubs. Don't go to bars. Don't go to cafés. If you must go to cafés, at least go to the right kind, and go with a girlfriend, never a man. Never be seen alone with a man, never, not anywhere. Don't wear anything that shows your knees. Don't show your feet, don't show your upper arms, don't wear red. Don't walk

alone after the sun has gone down. Never go out alone, and especially not at night—I mean, you can do whatever you want, you're a foreigner, but not even prostitutes go out alone at night.

The Kingdom of Morocco is a constitutional monarchy based in part on Islamic law. Although its people are diverse (Arabs, Berbers, Saharans, scant Jews and Christians, sub-Saharan Africans migrating northward), it is an Islamic country of Islamic mores. One of these is gender segregation. Another is that a man ought to be his family’s sole provider, although in reality this is becoming difficult. The 2004 Family Law, which aimed to modify traditional

CONSENSUAL SEX BETWEEN UNMARRIED PEOPLE IS ILLEGAL IN MOROCCO. BUT THE LAW IS ONE THING, ACTUAL SEX IS ANOTHER

practices, was at least a theoretical step in the direction of equality. It granted women more rights in the negotiation of marriage contracts, limited polygamy, and officially raised the minimum marriage age for females from fifteen to eighteen. (It also granted judges wide latitude to allow younger people to marry—in 2011, 12 percent of the country’s marriages involved at least one minor, and almost all those minors were girls.)

But this much hasn’t changed: in Morocco it is still culturally and socially imperative that a woman be a virgin before marriage. Many marriage contracts include a clause stipulating that the bride produce a certificate of virginity before the wedding can take place. A falsified certificate is grounds for divorce.

One night I asked a Moroccan friend about this. He was an upper-class man in his late twenties who’d been educated abroad and whose family owned a grocery-store chain (and who, in fact, I’d been sleeping with). He laughed and said, “Sarah, I don’t know a single unmarried Moroccan woman who’s still a virgin.”

Lucky for you, I thought. “When you get married,” I asked, “will you marry a virgin?”

“Of course,” he said, without hesitation. “For my family!”

Consensual sex between unmarried people is illegal in Morocco. But the law is one thing, actual sex is another. In Morocco, a complex sleight of hand takes place between the state and its people. On one hand, Moroccans seem self-policing, puritanical, absolutist; on the other, they find ways for unmarried men and women to come together despite the law. A woman can have her hymen resewed, but the surgery is expensive. Or, if she’s resourceful and a skilled actress, she might resort to an artificial hymen made in China, a soluble pouch filled with fake blood to be inserted twenty minutes before penetration.

I met Khadija and her friend Ghita at a café inside a circus-style tent on the edge of town. A ten-piece band was playing *chaabi* music at an absurd volume to a room filled with apple-scented smoke and pubescent boys seated at plastic patio tables with sunflower seeds and soda bottles piled high. Khadija pulled me up to dance with her a couple of times, but I shied away. When she finally succeeded, we danced face-to-face, smiling and ignoring the eyes that fell on us.

After we danced, we sat next to each other in the back of the tent. We didn’t talk because it was impossible to hear, but still there were signs of friendship. She shoved her pack of cigarettes in my direction and I took one; a man came up to her to talk, and after she’d laughed and flirted with him for a while, she sat down and rolled her eyes at me.

Later that night, she sat with me on my sofa, sipping hot tea. We talked about family. Her father had died when she was young, which explained, she said, why she had dropped out of school after third grade and how, at fourteen, she’d been raped by a neighbor. Eventually I learned that, in order to uphold the family’s honor, she had been forced to marry the man who had raped her, a not uncommon

practice in poor communities, and one the Moroccan penal code encouraged until recently by exonerating rapists of minors who married their victims.

Khadija asked me, "Is your mother still living?"

It was an odd question. She hadn't asked about my father, even though we had been talking about hers. "No," I replied, "she's not." My mother, a feminist leader in Iowa, killed herself in 1978. I didn't say this, and Khadija didn't ask anything further.

I liked Khadija. She didn't judge me for being unmarried, or for smoking cigarettes and drinking in public. Nor did she make fun of my Arabic or force me to repeat *Maghreb zween* ("Morocco is beautiful") or *Islam zween* ("Islam is beautiful"). Together we smoked hash, flirted with men, and danced.

I learned from a mutual friend that Khadija was a prostitute. The boys she left with at the end of the night were customers, not casual flings. It was difficult for me to recognize the difference, since she didn't go home with someone every night, and it all looked so much like casual sex in the United States. I'm still not certain she was paid each time.

Weeks passed. My rental home was burglarized. My computer was stolen and, with it, most of my research. But by then I had already abandoned my original project. Instead I began to write about Khadija and Ghita. I sat in the café where they worked, I listened to their talk, we danced, we smoked, we drank tea—and then I went home and wrote it down.

I told the women I was writing about them, and began recording our conversations. I wasn't hiding anything, and they weren't looking for explanations. Still, the complexity of the situation unnerved me. In a country that was a colonial protectorate as recently as 1956, and that was still notably touchy about image and seldom tolerant of critical dialogue, a Western woman writing about prostitutes was bound to encounter suspicion, although Khadija and Ghita didn't seem to mind. Of

course, they were unaware of the kind of power that someone writing about their lives could have. They could barely read Arabic, let alone English. They knew about the Internet, but I'm not sure whether they had ever been online.

During this time, Ghita suggested to Khadija that they give up prostitution for factory work. But Khadija wasn't interested. She pointed out that they wouldn't make nearly as much money, and would have to rise at dawn and work ten hours a day. It was clear that Khadija made the decisions for the pair, even though she wasn't as bright as Ghita, who had a small animal's keenness (and who, having been gang-raped as a teenager, was always looking over her shoulder).

SHE HAD NO HUSBAND TO SERVE, AND DIDN'T LIVE WITH MALE RELATIVES WHO WOULD GIVE HER LIFE A VENEER OF RESPECTABILITY

One night I went to a café to meet the women, but Khadija wasn't there. Ghita said that she'd been kidnapped by her boyfriend, who lived somewhere near Tangier, and that he had probably locked her up. It's happened before, she added.

I contacted a visiting American scholar who was studying Moroccan domestic violence to ask what I should do. She said I could call a hotline in Tangier to report the problem, but since no one knew where Khadija was, it was unlikely to do much good. I wondered whether Ghita knew more than she had said—whether she was worried that my involvement would make matters worse, whether she had resigned herself to the belief that nothing could be done.

The police weren't an option, since they were unlikely to help a prostitute and might even prosecute her. I felt distressed and powerless, so I did the thing I do when faced with dire situations: I slept. I slept for a few days until I could work up the courage to call Ghita and ask whether she had heard anything.

"Oh yes," she said, "Khadija's back at the café." When I went, I saw Khadija with a cut lip and yellow bruises circling each eye. She was still smoking, still working, and still alive.

Khadija was a rebellious person, a frustrated person, a person whose life was incredibly unstable. Yet I also saw in her someone who thrived on risk, its highs and lows. I'm not saying she enjoyed working as a prostitute, but she took pride in not letting her spirit be ground down by a factory job. She no longer had a husband to serve; she didn't live with male relatives who oversaw her life and gave it a veneer of respectability. She didn't have a pimp either. She was free, to some degree, of society's expectations, because she had stepped outside that society's conventional boundaries long ago.

My grant money ran out. Before I left Morocco, I went to Khadija's house to give her some clothes. The place was more construction site than actual abode: chalky poured concrete and dust everywhere. On the floor of the windowless ten-by-ten room that she shared with Ghita were orange peels, cigarette butts, pots of moldy food, clothes, makeup in shoeboxes, and two skinny mattresses.

Khadija pulled a bottle of liquid medicine from under her djellaba. I asked what it was for and she said that she hadn't had her period in five weeks. We left it at that. I took my clothes out of various bags. She tugged at the denim of my jeans to test the quality, and stroked the silk of one of my skirts. Then she began to cry. I rubbed her back, feeling bad that I'd brought the clothes, that I'd changed our friendship, making myself into the American with handouts and Khadija into the Moroccan appreciating them.

She asked when I'd be leaving for the United States, and I told her in a few days. Then she asked when I was coming back to Morocco, and I told her I didn't know.

A day or two later, just before my flight, she called me from a pay phone to ask for money for an abor-

tion. Our mutual friend had told me that Khadija was lying about being pregnant. “She wants your money,” he said. I didn’t have it anyway.

Then came revolution in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya—and, for one shining moment, in Morocco. On February 20, 2011, thousands of young activists around the country rallied for a new constitution, an

popular dialogue unlike any in Morocco’s history, and feminist groups began angling to include a guarantee of gender equality in the new constitution. Still, it didn’t look like traditional mores would change anytime soon. All over Morocco, lost girls sat in cafés, waiting for clients.

That was when I went back. It had been more than two years since I had spoken with Khadija. The café in the seaside town was

of one of the two spiral staircases. Her hair was dyed black. She was kissing friends hello. She turned to face me. It was Khadija.

She had changed. Gone was her floral-print djellaba—in its place was a black one made of clingy rayon and decorated with a dense silver appliqué. She was wearing makeup, and had lost the look of a wild kid who was out to have fun and get paid for it. She was shocked to see



end to corruption, and a reduction of the monarchy’s power. On March 9, King Mohammed VI responded to the February 20 movement by announcing constitutional reforms and appointing a commission to draft amendments. The protesters, whose numbers included radical youths, Islamists, teachers, doctors, and the educated unemployed, viewed the king’s handpicked commission as insufficiently democratic, and refused to be mollified by the promised reforms.

Lip service or not, the king’s speech opened up the potential for

still there. On the ground floor were the same tables, facing the same televisions suspended from the ceiling. Solitary men sat sipping espresso and smoking cigarettes, their gazes still trailing lazily over your body when you entered. Still the same mirrored walls and pillars, the same eyes and reflections of eyes.

The second floor was half full. I thought I saw Khadija, but it wasn’t her. Not five minutes passed, however, before I saw a woman emerge from a stewy disk of smoke at the top

me but hugged me immediately. Then she sat down and said she had a daughter now, Noura, and that Ghita had a son. So it had been true that she was pregnant.

I asked whether she had a picture of Noura with her. “No,” she said. She told me that Ghita’s first child had been given to a family in a nearby village, but that Ghita had kept the new baby, a boy, and was living with her grandmother and an uncle just outside town. As for Noura, she was living with a cousin. Khadija looked away when she told me this.

We were deep into catching up when all of the women at the surrounding tables rose to leave. "What's going on?" I asked. "The police have arrived," Khadija said. Her cell phone rang, and someone shouted her name from downstairs.

"In a minute!" she called out, unfazed.

Khadija didn't hold my earlier disappearance against me. Within a few weeks, she invited me to her new room, where she and her roommate lived out of suitcases and

clothes, children: everything cost money and no one had it. Ghita got up to say goodbye.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I have to go," she said, and left.

"She doesn't work from the café anymore," Khadija said. Ghita now wore a headscarf and had exchanged her djellaba for jeans and a hot-pink shirt with long sleeves. I asked whether the headscarf confused potential customers. "No," Khadija replied. "Everyone knows who she is, and anyway, some men like that."

"How many men do you meet like this?"

"Not many. It depends."

Dusk had fallen, and the swallows had quieted. We could see only the whites of each other's eyes, and our teeth. I asked where she took her customers, and she said a hotel. Which one? "That one," she said, pointing to a tall, glowing structure on a hill.

"Let's go," Khadija said one day at the café. Ghita and I had come to meet her earlier than usual. I



slept on thin mats. The place was windowless except for a big hole where the ceiling met the wall, which the women had plugged with a cushion. Khadija had to secure the door with a padlock, so the room felt like a kind of container, with its two inhabitants in a state of permanent transience.

"Everything costs money," she said one evening as I sat with her and Ghita at the café. Rent, food,

Later that evening, I saw Ghita from afar, walking down a barren street lined with buildings under construction. Her figure was small against the steel girders and the tarps flapping in the wind. I approached and kissed her hello as if we hadn't seen each other in a long time.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked. I thought of her son at home.

"It's safe," she said.

thought she was leaving to see a client in Tangier, but she led us silently to the oceanfront promenade. She sat on a concrete ledge and Ghita sat next to her. When Khadija finally spoke, she said that she was pregnant.

"Again?" I said. It just came out like that. "What are you going to do?"

She motioned with her hands, moving them below her belly to pull an invisible something from her

groin. "I've already got a baby," she said. Ghita looked down. Clearly she'd known.

Khadija said she knew a girl in Tangier who knew a doctor. If the price was too high, she'd go to another clinic, near Casablanca, but the cheaper clinic didn't use painkillers. "I've already got a baby," she said again.

I asked whether she knew whose it was. She looked angry that I had asked and said it didn't matter.

Under Moroccan law, abortions are regarded as an offense against public morality, prohibited unless necessary to protect the mother's health. But a week later, I went with Khadija to see the doctor in Tangier. Three elderly country women sat on a leather couch in the outer reception area; inside was another waiting room, where a man and a woman sat with their toddler, a boy with big eyes and a serious face.

Before leaving for the clinic, I had looked up the verbs *expect* and *plan* in my dictionary. If it came up, I wanted to express my regret that I hadn't been able to help her during my earlier trip—but also to be able to say that I wouldn't feel right about paying for this abortion either.

When we went into the examination room, the doctor rubbed gel on a wand, then applied the wand to Khadija's belly. "Yes, she's pregnant," he said, in French. "Beautiful women always get pregnant." I translated his words into *Darija* for Khadija, who didn't seem flattered.

"These are pills for her to take," the doctor said, writing a prescription. "After seven days, she must come back to see me. We will do another ultrasound to see if she is still pregnant. If she is, we'll have to do a surgical abortion." This visit was free, he added, but the next time she would have to pay 200 dirhams (about \$25). If she was still pregnant at the next visit, the surgical abortion would cost 2,000 dirhams. For sex, Khadija earned 200 dirhams, sometimes less.

We got into a taxi. "Pharmacy Paris!" Khadija told the driver. She paid 47 dirhams for the pills, and once we returned to the street, I watched

how other Moroccans watched her. Boys screamed out to her, women looked at her sideways. Were they looking because she was beautiful? Because she was a stranger? Because they knew she was a prostitute? I wanted to access their thoughts, and then I wanted to protect Khadija against them.

Khadija kept working during her pregnancy, about which she spoke little. When I asked whether she was still taking the pills, she said yes. She was going to the café earlier than usual, because the police had started sweeping the area, picking up girls inside and on the street, but they generally didn't come by until evening.

One day when I arrived at the café, I saw Khadija sitting at a corner table with a man I had never met. The

"YES, SHE'S PREGNANT," THE
DOCTOR SAID, IN FRENCH.
"BEAUTIFUL WOMEN ALWAYS
GET PREGNANT"

minute I sat down with them, he got up, taking his newspaper with him. The waiter came, and I ordered a Coke. Khadija said nothing. As always, an American movie was playing on multiple televisions, with Arabic subtitles and the sound muted. This one starred Leonardo DiCaprio. He was someplace tropical and distant, on a vacation gone terribly wrong, running from brown people in a jungle.

Khadija was hoping for a client, but few men were around this early in the day. When the girls were picked up by the police, she said, they were taken to the station, forced to pay some money, then released. No big deal. I asked whether she had ever been picked up, and she said no. I asked whether a woman who was picked up might have to sleep with a policeman in order to be released. "It happens," she said. "And they still have to pay the fine."

Khadija had a habit of sighing when there was nothing to be said

or done. She would say, "*Iwa*," which was like saying "Oh, well" or "So," to no one in particular. Sometimes she would say this when she had been waiting a long time, which meant she said it often. "*Iwa*," she said as the film played. Then she added a Moroccan expression, something to do with Allah, and those you meet, and *khair*—goodness. She said the phrase slowly a few times and made me repeat it.

"Like that," she said. "Very good, Sarah. You understand?" I said I did, though as with most expressions of hope, all I got was the gist.

We watched Leonardo DiCaprio peer at us through binoculars, after which he and a brunette had what looked like a crucial fight. I asked Khadija whether she knew what a Family Booklet was.

The Family Booklet proves a Moroccan's identity and civil status. With few exceptions, the country restricts ownership of one to married men, and it contains the details of births, marriages, divorces, and deaths for each family member. Being listed in a Family Booklet allows its bearer to obtain a national identity card, a passport, a driver's license, medical care and social services, legal aid, a vaccination booklet, a birth certificate, a marriage certificate, and a residence certificate. A booklet is also required in order to register for literacy classes, gain employment, start a business, purchase property, open a bank account, receive money transfers, claim an inheritance, and enroll children in school. In short, without a Family Booklet, a Moroccan does not legally exist.

Yes, Khadija told me, she knew what a Family Booklet was. She was looking down at her coffee, stirring it. I sensed that she didn't like the question.

"Is your daughter listed in a Family Booklet?" I asked.

She said no. Then she turned to face me. "You know, Ghita provides for her whole family. Did you know that?"

Khadija pointed to the coffee in front of her, tugged on her djellaba, then pointed to her cell phone and to the television. She pressed the fingertips of her right hand together

and pointed them toward her mouth to indicate food. "All of it," she said. "Ghita has to provide all of it for her family—for her grandmother, her son, her uncle who won't get a job."

"I know," I said. "I know."

Khadija got up to use the bathroom. I waited for her to come out, but a long time passed without any sign of her. Leonardo DiCaprio was performing an assisted suicide for a comrade, pinching his nostrils: the man's head started to convulse and his body went limp. Khadija was still not back. Where was she? Had the police taken her?

Finally, she reappeared. She had been concealed behind a mirrored pillar, and now she stood at a man's table, talking. I watched his hand cup her ass, travel up to her lower back, then slide back down to her ass and linger there for several minutes. She leaned over and picked up his cigarettes, then walked back to our table, smiling. She filled her own pack with his cigarettes and returned to give him what was left. When she came back again, she said, "*Iwa*."

I wanted to ask whether she had a Family Booklet for herself, but I chickened out. Instead, we left the café. "If you could do any other work," I said once we were outside, "what would you do?"

"Like what?" she asked. We walked in silence for a bit. In one hand, she was holding her shiny wallet and a blue pack of Gauloises. She wore sunglasses, a pair with curly silver designs on the sides that went well with the appliqué of her djellaba.

"Like what?" she asked again. "I can't read, Sarah."

I didn't dare suggest she work in a factory. "You could do hair."

"You have to be able to read to work in a salon," she said. "To get the license." We walked a bit further.

"Well, why don't you learn to read?" I said.

"I know I should."

"You can," I said. "You're young and you can still learn to read."

"There are places here," she volunteered, "for people like me." She tilted her chin toward the town.

I wanted to imagine her sitting in a literacy class, but I couldn't. I could only see her getting up from her desk to leave.

The protests continued in Marrakesh, in Rabat, in Casablanca. In May, in the coastal city of Temara, the February 20 movement attempted a protest picnic outside the headquarters of the state intelligence agency—where a secret CIA-funded detention center was believed to be located. Many of the protesters were beaten.

I learned that Fadoua Laroui, a single mother of two, had set herself on fire in Souk Sebt, a hundred miles northeast of Marrakesh. It happened just two months after a

SOME MEN MIGHT BE WILLING TO
MARRY A PROSTITUTE. "THEY'LL DO
IT TO HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD," GHITA SAID

Tunisian, Mohamed Bouazizi, had set off the Arab Spring by doing the same thing. Laroui died two days after immolating herself. Her death received very little press coverage, but you can watch purported footage of the immolation online. Moroccan officials said that she was crazy. Others said that she killed herself out of desperation—that the shanty where she lived with her children had been destroyed, and that the land she had been promised as part of a public-housing program had been sold to a local businessman. She had appealed six times through the proper channels, and had been told each time that she couldn't benefit from the program because she was a single mother, and therefore not the head of a household.

Khadija had never heard of Fadoua Laroui. I asked her whether she knew what was happening with the constitutional reforms. She said she understood that there would be changes, but she didn't know what they would be. In fact, no one knew what they would be: the king's commission was still drafting them. Even so, promonarchy groups waded through the

town's streets holding up photographs of the king emblazoned with the word *NAM* ("yes")—propaganda encouraging Moroccans to vote in favor of the reforms, no matter what they were.

Not long after, Ghita spoke to me about Khadija. Her problem, Ghita said, was that she was always looking for love and always giving away her things. "She'll let men do anything to her," Ghita said. "It's shameful for the rest of us." I was surprised to hear her turn against her friend. "She lets men do anything they want," she said again. I imagined Khadija inside a hotel room with a man on top of her. I wondered if what Khadija wanted counted for much.

"She should be more secret," Ghita said. "It's important to work in secret, so that one day when you want to stop and get married, your man doesn't know what you did before. Your man is not going to want to marry a prostitute."

Ghita allowed that some men might be willing to marry a prostitute. "They'll do it to have a good relationship with God, maybe to make up for bad deeds. They feel like they're doing a good thing, helping a girl out of a bad situation. The girl will feel like this man saved her life, and she will love him and they'll be happy. A lot of women have been through this," she said. "It's not rare."

I was about to travel to the south of the country, before returning to the United States. For days, I called Khadija in hopes of arranging a last visit. I had makeup and other things to give her, but each time we planned to meet, she stood me up. I gathered she didn't want to see me again, or that she had found a new boyfriend. I found Ghita walking the streets as the sun fell and gave her my gifts to pass along.

A week later, Khadija called. I was far from the seaside town by then. "What's with that makeup you gave to Ghita?" she asked. I told her the makeup had been intended for her. "She kept it for herself," Khadija said.

There was nothing I could do. We haven't spoken since. I've tried to call, but her number no longer

works, and neither does Ghita's. Our mutual friend told me that Ghita had stopped working as a prostitute, and that Khadija had left town.

Where she went, nobody seemed to know.

Between the Middle Atlas and High Atlas mountain ranges, where the earth turns dry, in a city not far from where Fadoua Laroui died, I met a widow named Fatima who was

couldn't say outright that they provided services for sex workers, though many of them did. They were secular, and often funded by other countries.

Fatima had sat next to me during one of these workshops, leaning in and whispering, "You'll come to my house to meet my daughter?" That night she served tea, *petit pains*, *meloui* (a spongy pancake), and semolina bread. She told me that

Fatima said that sex work scared her. She was afraid of getting sick. She did it strictly to support her children.

Then she told me a story about a man who had hired her for a night. She and a few other women had climbed into his 4x4. It was nighttime and the tinted windows in the truck were so dark that she couldn't see where they were being taken. They were told only that they were going to a villa. The man had offered the



living with her three children. One was a clever five-year-old girl named Marwah, another a three-year-old boy named Youssef. Fatima's eldest child was a severely handicapped ten-year-old girl who had to lie constantly on her back. Her arms and legs were like twigs, her feet like soft round cushions that were cold to the touch. I spoke to her in a silly Arabic, and she smiled.

I was in the region to conduct writing workshops for sex workers. They were hosted by nongovernmental women's associations that also provided literacy courses, vocational training, and counseling for victims of rape and domestic violence. Some offered temporary housing for single mothers. The groups

she had started doing sex work after her husband died. Then she tried to sell me a rug she had made on a loom in one of the house's three small rooms.

It was exactly the kind of rug I'd always wanted to buy in Morocco, a large, ivory-colored Beni Ourain shag with black crisscrosses. She was asking 200 dirhams, the same amount she would have received from a middleman who would hawk it to tourists at a significant profit. In America, it might have been worth a thousand dollars or more, but I couldn't bring myself to buy it. I imagined it under my feet back home. I might like it for a few weeks, but then it would make me sad, and I'd roll it up and shove it under my bed.

women 1,000 dirhams each, enough to cover Fatima's expenses for at least two months. When she got to the villa, she said, the man told her to fuck his dog.

"Did you?" I asked.

"Yes," Fatima said. "I drank a lot of alcohol, then I fucked his dog."

"Did he pay you the money he promised?"

"Yes, he paid me. He paid us all."

A boy came into the house as she told the story. "His mother is a prostitute, too," Fatima explained. He sat in a chair at the far end of the room and looked down. "Does he see his mother often?" I asked. "I don't know," Fatima said, and posed the question to the boy. "No," he said. He was ten years old,

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is words,
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and small. A perfectly good boy, but still his mother had disappeared.

It was time to leave. "You will not buy my rug?" Fatima said. No, I explained, it was too big to bring on the plane. "It will roll up small!" she said. I told her I was sorry.

Along with the neighbor boy and her two younger children, she accompanied me down the hill to find a cab. The boy held my hand as we walked.

The next morning I was sitting by myself in a hotel café drinking coffee, and I thought, How does a woman fuck a dog?

Men were seated at the tables around me. I was the only woman in the room. On the TV was news of war. The Americans were in Libya now. There were images of mass protests, then of explosions, bright balls of light, garish clouds ballooning in a black sky.

Within the month, King Mohammed VI would unveil his constitutional reforms and call for a referendum. The proposal stipulated that a prime minister, chosen from the largest party in parliament, would take over as the head of the government, although the king would retain control of the judiciary, the military, and the Islamic faith in Morocco. There was even an article guaranteeing women civic and social equality with men. The February 20 movement argued that the process had been undemocratic—but, according to Moroccan officials, 98 percent of voters approved the new constitution.

World leaders, ignoring allegations of fraud, praised Morocco's handling of the reforms. The process was hailed as a model for the region. Not long after, a sixteen-year-old Moroccan girl named Amina Filali killed herself with rat poison in order to escape her husband, a man she had been forced to marry after he raped her when she was fifteen.

Once I finished my coffee at the café, I made my final visit to a woman working in prostitution. Her name was Fatima, too. She was a mother, and she had also experienced damage and hurt. She was funny and warm and crass and political. She was not resigned, and I loved her for it. ■

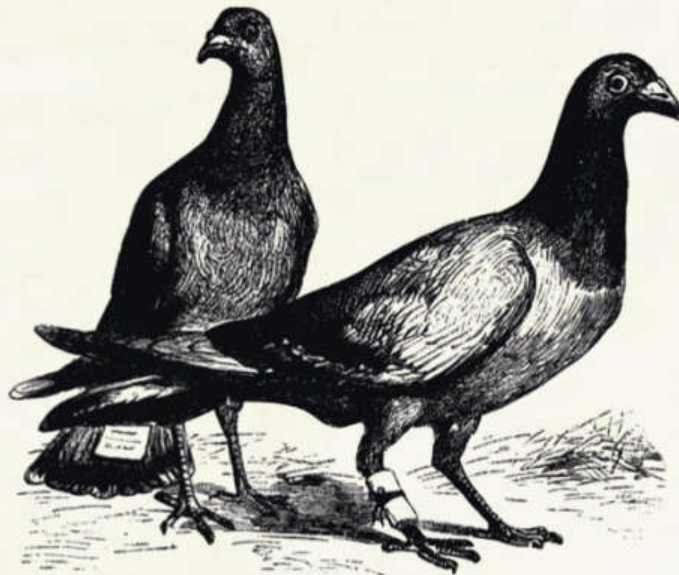
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BIRDS ON THE WANE

By *É. B. Leonard*

Before the invention of the electric telegraph enabled man to outrival the boast of Shakespeare's Puck that he would "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes," the carrier-pigeon afforded the most rapid means of conveying intelligence between places far remote from each other. In ages the memory of which is dimly preserved in vague legends and traditions, these graceful couriers of the air were employed to carry messages of love and war. It is surmised by some writers that the "dove" let loose from the Ark, which returned at eventide with an olive branch in its beak, was a carrier-pigeon. On one occasion when an Egyptian king assumed the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, a prince let fly four pigeons and commanded them to announce to the south, north, west, and east that "Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, has put on the splendid crown of the Upper and Lower country; that the king Ramses III has put on the two crowns." At the memorable siege of Mutina, Hirtius and Brutus held constant communication by this means, while Antony, through whose beleaguering host no courier could make his way, beheld with rage and chagrin the passage to and fro of these aerial messengers. In vain he tried every expedient to intercept them. Nets and lures were of no avail, nor could

his strongest and most expert archers bring them down as they sped their way, far above the camps, between the besieged and their friends. Wealthy



METHODS OF ATTACHING THE MESSAGE.

Romans carried pigeons in baskets to the Amphitheatre, for the purpose of sending home the names of guests whom they invited at that place of amusement, or to order a change in the dinner. The building being open at the top, the released messengers would rise above the walls and fly home with the important information.

Tasso refers to the employment of carrier-pigeons at the siege of Jerusalem, and relates how Godfrey, commander of the Christian host, on one occasion protected one of these messengers from the attack of a falcon

which had been let loose by the infidels to destroy it. It is a historical fact that they were employed during the Crusade of Louis IX, in 1219. When the Christian army attacked Mansurah, the Saracens sent off a pigeon to Cairo with a billet announcing the fact attached to its wing, and later the same day another pigeon was dispatched to carry the news of the total defeat of the French.

Since the general introduction of the electric telegraph the carrier-pigeon has lost much of its importance in Europe as a news carrier; but down to a very recent period it was always employed when celerity as well as security was desired. During the Napoleonic Wars, news of great battles was transmitted to governments and private parties by this means when the ordinary modes of sending dispatches by couriers were attended by danger and delay. They are still, or were until very recently, employed in England to announce the results of the great races, affording a surer and speedier means of transmitting private intelligence than the overcrowded telegraph, over which messages are frequently delayed for hours by the pressure of business. The winged messenger in nine cases out of ten would arrive at its destination while the dispatch was still waiting its turn on the telegrapher's desk. ■

From "Pigeon Voyagers," which appeared in the April 1873 issue of Harper's Magazine. The complete essay—along with the magazine's entire 165-year archive—is available online at harpers.org/fromthearchive.

MIRACLES AND WONDERS

One woman's search for a perfect bra

By Sallie Tisdale

The human breast moves in complex ways, a fleshy oscillation. This was demonstrated in an experiment conducted by Australian researchers, in which large-busted women ran on a treadmill while wearing infrared-emitting diodes on their chests. I wince at the thought of it. Breasts have no muscle; they are collections of glandular and fibrous connective tissues and fat, supported in part by the skin. The average weight of a woman's breast is around a pound, but breast weights of ten pounds and above are possible; breasts range from soft lemons to flopping eggplants, and they swing, brother: a demonstration of Newton's second law with every step.

Unlike other mammals, humans have breasts that remain mature outside lactation. We are born with mammary glands spread within the chest wall, stretching from the armpit down toward the groin, but not with breasts. They are the only or-

Sallie Tisdale's most recent essay for Harper's Magazine, "An Uncommon Pain," appeared in the May 2013 issue. Her Annotation, "The Magic Toilet," appeared in the June 2015 issue.



gans to develop after birth—usually a single pair, though extra breasts do occur, in both men and women. Unmistakable, yet greatly varied, the visible breast can be shaped like a pear, melon, apricot, or orange—for some reason, produce is a common metaphor—but also like a cone, sausage, softball, plate, ham, or loaf of bread. The fibrous tissue of the breast is a kind of suspensory structure called Cooper's ligaments that allows the breasts to move freely but gives little support. Breasts may lie near each other or be widely spaced; they may grow high on the chest or low. The nipples can point toward each other, away from each other, up, down, or straight ahead.

Breasts can change dramatically, sometimes gaining and losing more than 10 percent of their weight during a single menstrual cycle. Size is largely a matter of fat deposition and seems to be genetically determined. Fat women can have small breasts and slim women can have medium breasts, but the idealized figure with large breasts on a thin body is rare—at least rare in nature.

Not uncommonly, a woman's breasts are different sizes. Breasts of the same shape and size may have different mass; breasts of different shapes may have the same mass but different degrees of flaccidity. For women, the peak of breast development is around the age of twenty, and atrophy begins by forty. Breasts come and breasts go, and when gone, they are often acutely missed.

No one can explain why women have continually swollen breasts; the evolutionary function of such a unique body part is hard to fathom. Many have theorized that the loss of strong pheromonal attractants in humans required a compensatory mechanism—because otherwise how would a man know a woman? Such theories fail to explain a great deal

about human sexual desire and even less about the life of the breasted.

We simply have them, almost all our lives.

The bra is not a new idea. Aphrodite wore a *kestos*, a strapless band or girdle that wrapped around the breasts and fastened in front; she claimed it contained all her charms. Egyptians wore a long sheath that stopped just below the breasts, which were somewhat hidden by its wide straps. (According to lore, the breasts were sometimes painted, blue ink tracing the veins, gold covering the nipples.) The ancient Romans wore a breast band called a *mamillare*. The Cretans wore a short jacket, open in the front; later they wore a kind of extreme push-up bodice that bared the nipples proudly.

By the Renaissance, sophisticated European women were wearing corsets made from linen stiffened with paste on a skeleton of metal, wood, or whalebone. They were a marker of wealth and leisure, impractical to the point of the ridiculous—and a kind of torture. In the thirteenth-century Caucasus, girls wore, even while asleep, elaborate corsets made of leather straps meant to keep the breasts from growing. Early corsets were designed to compress the breasts, but their length and shape changed with the demands of fashion; by the 1600s, the goal was to accentuate the breasts. Europeans briefly abandoned the corset during the Romantic era in order to wear imitations of Grecian gowns. But it returned with a vengeance, becoming so severe by the end of the nineteenth century that a woman's posture was forced into an unbalanced S shape, with the hips jutting backward and the chest tilting forward. In 1897, Sears was marketing corsets for girls as young as eight.

The shortened garment first known as a bust- or breast-supporter and then as a brassiere was the product of several forces. The Industrial Revolution demanded women with stamina; the brassiere made it easier for women to breathe, and thus to work. Women of leisure preferred it for the new sports of bicycling and tennis. But most of all, fashion commanded and fashion was obeyed. The trim "princess" dress of the turn of the century didn't fit over a

straight-front corset. Empire dresses needed bustlines, not waspish waists. Fashion sometimes required lush décolletage and sometimes boyish flatness, but never again were women forced into the shape of an S. By the early 1900s, bras were being sold in department stores, and women left their corsets on the closet floor with what I imagine as a loud and collective thud.

The bra has been stretched and molded and cut up and put back together in countless ways for more than a hundred years. Fragile silk and chiffon gave way to rayon, which gave way to nylon and Lycra and Jayne Mansfield. Soft elastic was added, and then countered with rigid underwire. Postwar breasts turned into torpedoes pointing at the shiny future. Bras softened, briefly threatened to disappear, then came back again—pushing up and out, promising miracles and wonders—and several thousand years of female annoyance culminated in the first bra ever seen in the fourth

grade at Jackson Street Elementary School.

I grew big breasts at an early age without any wish to do so, and over the decades they have swelled and shrunk and swelled again—from menses and pregnancy and nursing; from weight gained and weight lost; from menopause; from surgery, time, and gravity. I have a photograph of myself at the age of about eleven. I am at Girl Scout summer camp, leaning on my friend Charlie, our arms wrapped around each other's shoulders, grinning. My breasts are visible, small shadows on my white shirt, but I am still free of them. I am at this point too young to know what large breasts mean—to men, to athletic coaches, to friends, to my daily routine. I love track and gymnastics, climbing trees, swimming, and hiking, and my breasts are not yet in the way of anything.

I have friends who never wear bras; their breasts are little apricot mounds, soft, barely there. For the most part, I envy those friends. Perhaps they envy me. My breasts are a little above average for American women, large enough that they cannot be forgotten for long. I've heard men say that wearing a bra is like wearing a necktie, but it's a lousy comparison. A bra is more

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Four lives entwine around the untimely deaths of two young men in the Catalan countryside...



THE BOYS

Toni Sala

translated by Mara Faye Lethem

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— *La Vanguardia*

"*The Boys* confirmed that what I believe to be literature is still possible... a masterpiece."

— Narcís Comadira, *Ara*



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like a tight jockstrap that you are obligated to wear all day, every day, wherever you are, because your testicles are so large that your pants don't fit otherwise, so large that they flap painfully against your thighs, chafing each other and jiggling conspicuously with every step. Envy that.

One of my friends buys bras only when they're on sale, because, she says, they never seem to fit anyway. One woman swears by Genie; another wears only Maidenform. Many women simply buy the same size and often the same style of bra they've worn since high school. The general sense of resignation that many women feel about bras is often attributed to the belief that most of us—eight out of ten is a commonly cited number—are wearing the wrong size. Fitting consultants for Wacoal compared the size of bra their customers were wearing with the size the fitters thought they should wear. The company confirmed that only 20 percent of customers were about right.

"The intimate-apparel department is massive," an executive at Wacoal told me. She's not kidding. There are demi-cup bras and full-coverage bras, racerbacks and gatebacks and U-backs, front closures and back closures, convertible bras and bandinis and halter necks. There are bras with seamless cups, which don't fit the same way as bras with diagonally seamed cups, which don't fit the same way as vertically seamed cups. Cups can be soft or molded, underwired or wireless. There are balcony styles and minimizer bras that compress the breasts, and padded bras that add size. There are sports bras that hold the breast tissue against the chest and push-up bras that squeeze the breasts to create cleavage; Victoria's Secret now sells a push-up sports bra.

What can seem like a mind-boggling variety of styles and sizes at first glance quickly blurs into a faceless sea, each bra hung cup to cup with its sisters in a wonderland of white and beige and black, with a bit of red lace and blue ribbon here and there. The Hanes Natural Lift and Shape ComfortFlex Fit Underwire Bra (\$14) competes with Wacoal's Casual Beauty Wire Free Soft Cup Bra (\$48), Fantasie's Jacqueline Underwired Full Cup Bra with Side

Support (\$76), and Chantelle's Opéra Demi Bra (\$110). The manufacturers will passionately argue that these bras cannot be compared, that they are worlds apart, and that a woman needs a "wardrobe of bras," as many people in the business have told me. In many ways they seem to be a single bra in endless superficial variation: a tweak of lace here, a wider strap there, and a deeper cup here separating (lifting and separating) one variety from another. This is true, but manufacturers will tell you that none of this matters, which is not true. (Bras are destined to have terrible names. If I want "ooh-la-la," I can try Hanes's Bombshell Boudoir Double Pleasure Underwire Bra.) The most obvious difference is the price: you can pay ten dollars or 200 dollars for a bra, and there is no guarantee that one will fit much better than the other.

To build a better bra is a common dream. In pursuit of perfection, bra designs have borrowed elements of the bridge, the hammock, the sack, the belt, the net, the shelf, the buttress, the splint, the tourniquet, and the rigging of a ship. None, despite the ubiquitous ad copy swearing that I have never had a bra as good as this one, that this bra will be the best bra I've ever owned, that this bra, at last, is the bra I will look forward to wearing all day long, has been entirely satisfactory. The weight of a large breast can cause nerve damage, skin rashes, and severe back pain. A bra's purpose is to contain and redirect this force.¹

Most bras have dozens of components; a commercially made bra may have fifty different pieces made by suppliers in different countries. Thou-

¹ *Whether bras can stop breasts from developing or cause problems for breast health is a question that has been raging for more than a century, hard on the heels of concerns about how corsets compressed the lungs and abdominal organs. There are plenty of women who believe that the breasts are supported by the pectoral muscles and that wearing a bra will weaken the musculature, rather like legs weakening when we don't walk. There is also a body of belief that bras cause a kind of toxic congestion in the breast, leading to disease—including cancer. There is no scientific support for these beliefs.*

sands of bra patents have been issued (almost half the bra patents filed before 1969 were by women): bras with better side panels and better straps and better fasteners and better cups; bras built into T-shirts, tank tops, and pajamas; bras for hiding breast-milk pumps and a bra with a built-in breast pump. Bras with pockets. Air-filled bras to resist impact. Bras that use silver fibers to dispel body odor. Bras that can be decorated, written on, lit up, and perfumed; bras that cool you off and bras that warm you up. Bras that solve every problem of the bra at once.

To make a bra correctly requires a dizzying combination of measurements: the width of the sternum, the arc of the breast mound, the distance between the nipple and the shoulder. Most of the support in a bra does not come from the cups or the straps, as many women assume; support is provided by the band that surrounds the body. The underwire, which was added to bras just a few decades after the corset disappeared, partly encircles the breast for added support—and is probably the most hated part of any bra. Underwire comes in different curvatures, tensions, and lengths, and if not fitted perfectly to the size and shape of the breast, it will dig or poke. The designer must also consider the shape of the breasts, the direction in which they fall and how far apart they lie, the distribution of muscle above the breasts, the width and slope of the shoulders. Is the breast round, so that it will fill a cup, or shallow, so that it will fill only part of it? (Pregnancy often permanently hollows out the upper part of the breast.) Whether to put the closure in the front or the back, how wide to make the band, where and how to allow adjustment of the straps, how wide to make the straps, how big and of what shape to make the center bridge, and which fabric to use for the separate parts—each decision changes the degree of containment, movement, and support.

The first bra with separate cups was designed by Marie Tucek in 1893. Cup size has been designated by letter since the 1930s. Bra sizing is not universal; there are multiple systems

for determining size, using both English and metric measurements. Various formulas are used, including the circumference of the rib cage at the higher part of the breast and at the widest part of the breast.² A 36B is not the same as a 34C or a 38A of an otherwise identical bra. A 34B in one brand is not necessarily a 34B in the same type of bra made by another brand—and 34B in one style of a brand may not translate to 34B in another style made by the same brand. A 36B in New York is not a 36B in Sydney or Paris or Tokyo, where it may be a 14B or an 80C.

Buying a bra means trying on bras, lots of them. It means standing in a small room in the lingerie section of a department store while a saleswoman who, I hope, knows what she's doing measures me in several ways, runs the results through an equation, and confidently pronounces my size. Sometimes the fitter has been right and sometimes she's been close and sometimes every bra she's shown me has been wrong. Sometimes all the bras I've owned blur in my memory to a pile of white wired trusses.

There are currently thousands of companies selling bras around the world, but the industry is dominated by Hanes and Victoria's Secret. Hanes sells Playtex, Bali, Maidenform, Wonderbra, Lilyette, barely there, Champion, Just My Size, and Sol y Oro brands. In 2014, Hanes bought the European company DBApparel for \$528 million, making it one of the largest lingerie companies in the world. (Hanes refused to return my many phone calls.) Victoria's Secret, now the largest part of L Brands, has more than a thousand of its own stores and controls a large portion of the American lingerie market—exactly how much is a moving target.

Wacoal, a Japanese-held company with an American subsidiary, is the leading brand in the United States in

²Part of the American standard is said to be based on measurements taken from servicewomen—a particular cohort of young, fit women—as they were discharged after World War II, more than half a century ago.

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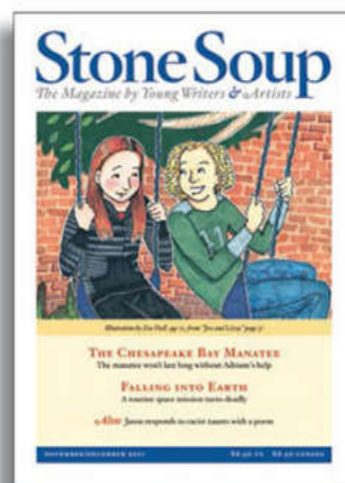
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what are called better department stores—Saks, Nordstrom, Lord & Taylor. Wacoal has positioned itself carefully. The company never puts its bras on sale. The American subsidiary alone employs more than eighty professional fitting consultants, who train salespeople in their client stores to fit Wacoal bras properly. Wacoal also supports the Susan G. Komen organization through thousands of "Fit for the Cure" events, donating a few dollars to Komen's breast-cancer research efforts for each fitting and for each bra sold at the events. Wacoal competes with Hanes in department stores but also with Warnaco, an American company that includes Calvin Klein, Warner's, and Olga, which was started by Olga Erteszek, a Polish immigrant who began by sewing bras at her kitchen table. European customers shop for Wacoal bras (in many subsidiary brands) along with Chantelle, a French company; the Belgian-owned Prima Donna, which focuses on larger-breasted women with upscale taste; the American-based Little Bra Company, which markets to women with smaller cup sizes; and the British companies Royce (which sells only wireless bras), Panache (which specializes in D cups and bigger), and Miss Mandalay (which markets to women with larger cup sizes). In its home country of Japan, women shop for Wacoal alongside such brands as Ravijour and N.SENS and the multinational company Triumph. In the increasingly competitive world of Web-based bra sales, Wacoal competes with everybody, including many custom designers.

In the past few years, Web-only companies like True&Co, HerRoom, Ampere, and Brayola claim to have solved the problem of fit and the drama of bra shopping simultaneously. ThirdLove offers a sizing app and sizes like 34C ½. Negative advertises "less fabric, more skin" to its preferred cohort of millennials. Adore Me has a lingerie-of-the-month club and a lot of softcore photography.

After days of Web surfing, I hit bra fatigue. It was partly due to the endless airbrushed photographs of slim, beautiful women with unnaturally large and perky breasts. I found the scent of sex that permeates the

world of bras tiring. I know that my breasts are far more than collections of fat and fibrous tissue. They are provocative and comforting; they have been stroked, nursed, kissed and slept upon, nestled and coddled and slapped with glee. My breasts, like most breasts, have been objects of love and hatred, hunger and confusion. They are like two small companions who live on my chest, whispering, demanding attention. But they are not always sexual, and looking sexy is actually the easiest thing to do in a bra. Being comfortable at work all day is the hardest, and not many companies are selling that these days. I grew tired of the breezy insistence that the difficulty of shopping for a bra was suddenly gone forever. And I got angry when I read that my nipples "should always point straight ahead." The idea that my breasts should behave in a particular way after having proved for many decades that they will

do as they please was discouraging at best.

I kept running across references to a particular bra called Jeuniqué on an interlocking set of websites that were rife with spelling errors and flashing neon ads for blue-green algae and Watkins vanilla extract. Jeuniqué bras are advertised online, but they are sold only in private consultations. With a little digging, I found my way to Gail Bogdanovich, an independent distributor and fitting consultant. Through her company, The Perfect Fit Custom Fitted Bras, she sells Jeuniqué-style bras. She is its sole employee.

Bogdanovich is sixty-three, a fast-talking Massachusetts native whose license plate reads BRA LDY. These days, she does fittings in health clubs and goes to department stores to hand out business cards to women in the lingerie section. She believes that if she can just "get the bra on the woman," she'll make a sale. The Jeuniqué is not a pretty bra—and it's not intended to be. "This is not a come-and-get-me, romantic, Victoria's Secret bra," she told me. "I don't really like to even put out pictures of the bras, because people judge a book by the cover."

Bogdanovich worked for years doing custom bra fittings for Cameo, a multilevel company similar to Mary Kay. She sold mostly at house parties, advancing in the company until she had a number of women working under her. She made a good salary and earned free vacations and prizes. Cameo was one of many small American bra manufacturers doing business in this way, and women like Bogdanovich—conservative but ambitious, confident, and personable—sold several brands at once. With Jeuniqué, Pennyrich, and Sculptress, they sold a practical style of bra that looks archaic by today's standards.

Cameo went out of business about twelve years ago, and many of Bogdanovich's distributors quit. But the Jeuniqué company was still in business, owned by a man named Mulford J. Nobbs, who believed that vitamin E had saved his life as a young man. He traveled to Hunza, in Pakistan, to learn the secret of a long life, and eventually dedicated his company to selling products for "improvements of Health and World Ecology." (The entire loose network of Jeuniqué consultants has the aura of health food and easygoing family values.) When Nobbs died, in his nineties, in 2010, Bogdanovich thought she'd have to give up private bra sales. But the Mexican manufacturer for Jeuniqué, who hoped to unload his inventory, found her. They made a deal: he would continue to make the bras and she would try to market them under the name LeUnique.

Today Bogdanovich sells LeUnique throughout the country. Dolores Sieben, who calls herself the Bra Lady, sells them out of Calgary, Canada. Maria Monti runs The Healthy Bra Company in Edmonds, Washington, and sells Jeuniqué-style bras only in conjunction with a postural-therapy session that requires multiple questionnaires and a telephone interview before the fitting. Dayna Player Robinson, a young exercise physiologist, sells the bras in St. George, Utah. Player Robinson discovered Jeuniqué on the bulletin board at her gym. "From the first time I put them on I knew this is what I had been looking for!" she writes on her website. "I NEEDED this bra!!" When she was unable to find anyone near her

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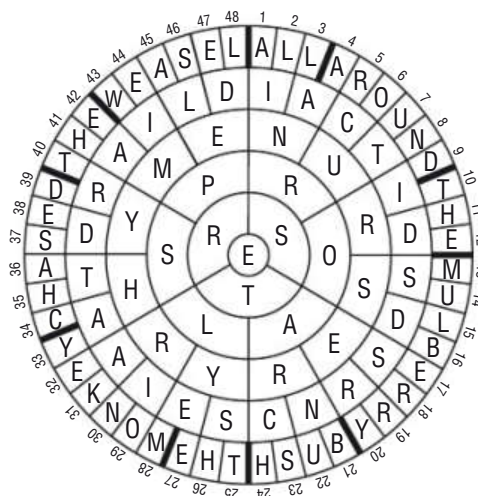
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SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER PUZZLE

NOTES FOR "VICIOUS CIRCLES":

Note: * indicates an anagram.

Quote: "All around the
mulberry bush, the monkey
chased the weasel"
—Nursery rhyme



CLUES: 1. aris(e)n*; 2. liners, two mngs.; 3. lea-RNs; 4. a-renas(rev.); 5. re-curs; 6. course, homophone; 7. su(rev.)-ture*; 8. unr(E)st; 9. dories, two mngs.; 10. sort-i.e.; 11. hordes, hidden; 12. e(rod)es(rev.); 13. mosses, first letters; 14. so-uses; 15. dossel, hidden; 16. bossed, two mngs.; 17. tea-see; 18. (f)Easter; 19. tearer, homophone; 20. eatery*; 21. B(ante)r; 22. na-(tur)-E, rev.; 23. caster*; 24. Th(rac)e; 25. sty-let; 26. Shelly*; 27. eyelet, homophone, islet; 28. meetl*Y; 29. lo(it)er*; 30. linter, hidden; 31. (s)talker; 32. relate, two mngs.; 33. Haye(R)s; 34. Ch(as)er; 35. T(hr)esh; 36. hearts, hidden; 37. dr([N]ess)y; 38. red-yes; 39. d(rye)rs; 40. T(err)ys[on]; 41. hamper, two mngs.; 42. AM-PE-r-E; 43. wimper, hidden; 44. premie*; 45. re-peal; 46. lepers, hidden; 47. Dee-per; 48. peddler, homophone.

who was selling the bras, she decided to sell them herself. “The bras come in a bazillion different sizes and then I custom-fit them. In stores, they measure you and say, ‘This is your size,’ and give you a lot of bras in that size. I do the opposite.”

I found Mary Jo Porter, who still sells Jeuniqué bras—along with the few Pennyrich and Cameo bras she has left—out of her spotless one-story house in a fifty-five-and-older subdivision, about half an hour from where I live, in Portland, Oregon. Porter is seventy-nine years old and barely five feet tall, and she has been a widow for fifteen years. When I visited her, an American flag was waving from a pole above her front porch. Ceramic angels and dolls in toy rocking chairs lined the shelves and windowsills in every room.

Porter sold Princess House crystal at house parties for years, she told me, enough to earn a trip to the Canary Islands. Eventually, she started selling bras. Over the years she’s been with Jeuniqué, she’s attended national seminars and prize banquets where she met Mulford J. Nobbs. These days, she mostly sells Color Me Beautiful make-up along with the occasional bra.

She led me into her neat bedroom and asked me to strip to the waist. We had known each other for five minutes. While I undressed, she pulled two giant rolling suitcases out of her closet and hefted them onto the bed. Each was filled with Jeuniqué bras.

“I had eleven thousand dollars’, twelve thousand dollars’ worth of inventory once,” she said, “and I cried when Nobby died.” Porter is selling down the inventory she has left—mostly to long-term customers, though once in a while she sells to someone who tracks her down, like me. “People bring their daughters and granddaughters to be fitted,” Porter told me, though it’s hard to imagine many teenage girls wearing a Jeuniqué.

Two things make the Jeuniqué different from other bras. First, it eliminates the underwire in favor of the “exclusive patented Air-O-Flex Banderin®”—a slightly molded plastic shelf that cups the breasts all the way under the arm. Second, the cups open

up in the style of a nursing bra and can be adjusted in tiny increments, to accommodate the small changes that most women tend to experience in their breast size.

The first bra she handed me didn’t fit; the band was too small and the cups too big. And so we worked, as in every bra fitting I’ve ever had, trying slight variations of size and style while she made adjustments and looked at my breasts with a critical eye. Once she grabbed the band in back and hauled it down. “If your toenails come through, I’ll know I’ve gone too far,” she said.

The bra felt strange—a bit tight, but not compressive. There were steps required—you had to reach around and pull the breast tissue through the opening before fastening the cup. But I could jump up and down with barely a bounce. Eventually I settled on a smooth, classic J41 (no awkward names here), and then the second part of the fitting began. Porter gave me detailed directions about how to put the bra on, wash it, wear it, and adjust it. This is a major bra. A complex bra. This is a bra with instructions.

Meanwhile, new bras are coming. Several companies are working with new materials that function like memory foam. Silent Assembly, an Australian company, has released a line of bras in America that uses “memory” nylon polymers and will be available in limited sizes. Silent Assembly’s CEO, Kay Cohen, claims that “women who try it swear it is the best bra they’ve worn.”

Deirdre McGhee and Julie Steele of the University of Wollongong, in Australia, who studied those women running on treadmills, are now working with the university’s Intelligent Polymer Research Institute to create a “smart bra” that uses a combination of electronics and tightly coiled nylon fibers. The bra is supposed to tighten with movement and loosen at rest, though a prototype has not yet been manufactured.

A few days ago, on an impulse, I went to a bra boutique I’d never visited before—a bright little store filled with bras in white and black and beige, but also polka dots and

paisley, fuchsia and lime green and neon blue, many with matching panties. An assertive young woman took me in hand immediately, sizing me up—literally, without a measuring tape—and sending me to the fitting room with a test bra. For most of an hour, she ferried bras back and forth, helping me and another woman—short, round, with a smaller band size and bigger cup than me—as we tried on bra after bra.

This was no department store. The other customer and I exchanged friendly comments. The lighting was warm, and so was the fitting room. Many of the brands were from small European companies.

The saleswoman told me that she used to work at Nordstrom. “I was trained really hard in fitting,” she said. “I’ve seen every kind of breast there is.” She got tired of working for a big store and jumped to the boutique when she had a chance.

I liked the Rosa Faia, the first bra she handed me, which was made by the German company Anita.

“Sturdy bra,” she said. “The Germans don’t mess around.” But I wanted to try more. For once, I was almost enjoying the experience.

“I’ll know it when I wear it,” I said.

“Yep,” she answered. “And the clouds will part and the sun will shine on through.” She dashed off to find a few more styles.

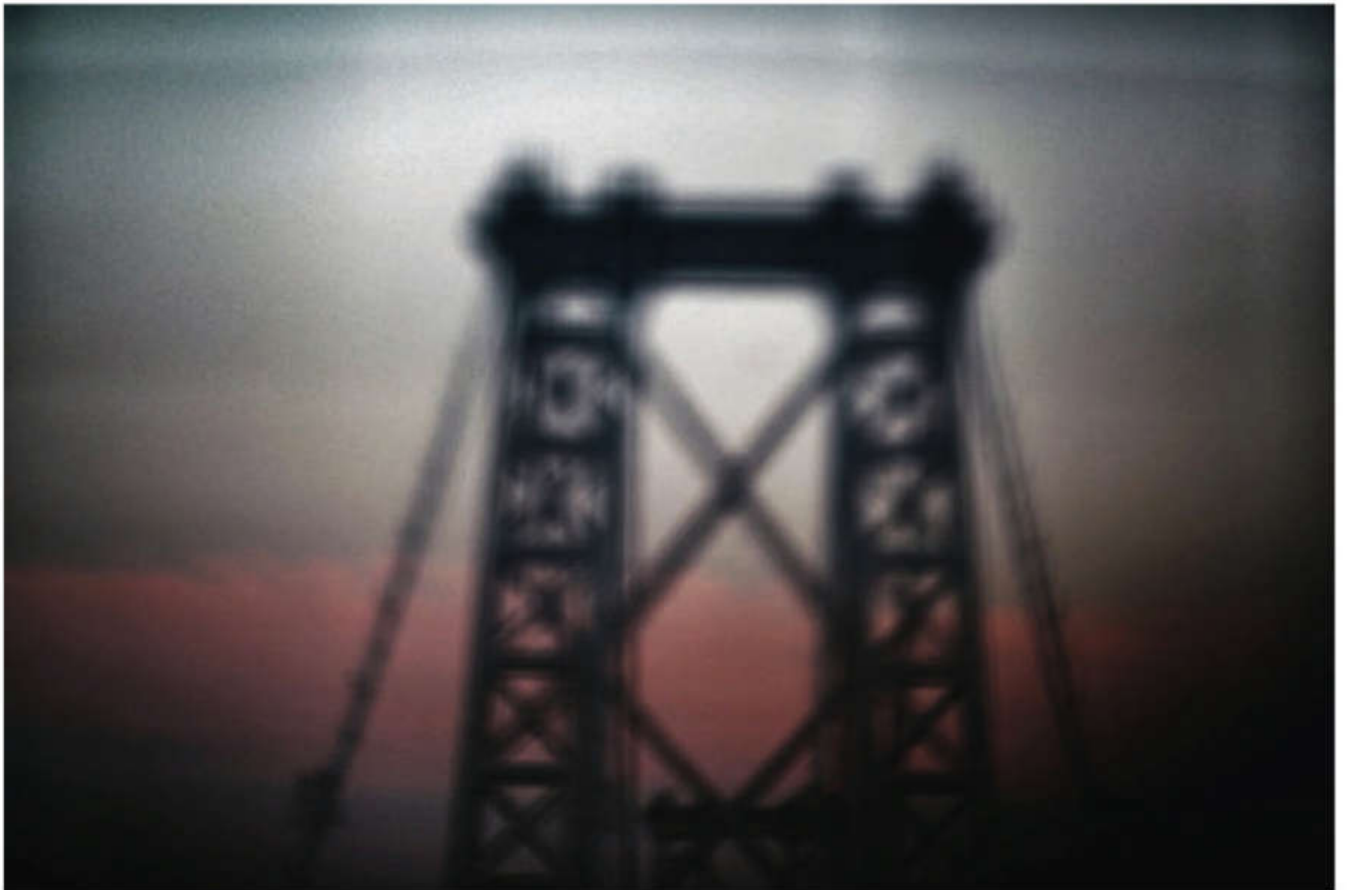
Finally, I settled on an Elomi bra, in white, for \$55.

“It’s made by Eveden,” she informed me. Eveden is part of Wacoal.

A year ago, I owned three bras. Today I own ten: a wardrobe of bras, as many people in the business have told me I must have. Which one do I wear? The Jeuniqué is not, after all, my favorite bra for daily wear. But it has such good support that I often wear it for exercise. I like my new Elomi, and under certain clothes I wear a seamless Bali. I wear them all, but none of them are eighteen-hour bras that I can forget are there. My favorite bra, the most comfortable bra, the one I wear when I’m home alone, is about ten years old. It is stretched and thin, so faded that I cannot read the label, and barely a bra at all. ■

WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE

By John Edgar Wideman



To be absolutely certain I rode the F train from my relatively quiet Lower East Side neighborhood to 34th Street and set myself adrift in the crowds around Penn Station and Herald Square. Short subway ride uptown in dark tunnels beneath New York's sidewalks, twenty-five, thirty minutes of daylight aboveground, among countless bodies hurtling ahead like trains

John Edgar Wideman has recently completed The Louis Till File, a book-length narrative.

underground, each one on its single-blind track.

Quick trip yesterday, so today I'm certain and determined, though not in any hurry. Why should I be? All the time in the world at my disposal. All mine the moment I let go. How much time do you believe you possess? Enough perhaps to spare a stranger a moment or two while he sits on the Williamsburg Bridge, beyond fences that patrol the pedestrian walkway, on an extreme edge where a long steel rail runs parallel to walkways,

bikeways, highways, and train tracks supported by this enormous towering steel structure, sky above, East River below, this edge where the bridge starts and terminates in empty air.

I heard Sonny Rollins play his sax on the Williamsburg Bridge once and only once live one afternoon so many years ago I can't recall the walkway's color back then. Definitely not the pale red of my tongue when I wag it at myself each morning in the mirror, the walkway's color today at the intersection of

Delancey and Clinton Streets where I enter it by passing through monumental stone portals, then under a framework of steel girders that span the 118-foot width of the bridge and display steel letters announcing its name. Iron fences painted cotton-candy pink guard the walkway's flanks, and just beyond their shoulder-high rails much taller barriers of heavy-gauge steel chicken wire bolted to sturdy steel posts guard the fences. Steel crossbeams, spaced four yards or so apart, form a kind of serial roof over the walkway, too high by about a foot for me to jump up and touch, even on my best days playing hoop. Faded cross-ties overhead could be rungs of a giant ladder once upon a time that slanted red up into the sky, but now the ladder lies flat, rungs separated by gaps of sky that seem to open wider as I walk beneath them, though if I lower my eyes and gaze ahead into the distance where the bridge's far end should be, the walkway's a tunnel, solid walls and ceiling converge, no gaps, no exit, a cul-de-sac.

Tenor-sax wail the color I remember from the afternoon, decades ago, I heard Sonny Rollins the first and only time live. Color deeper than midnight blue. Dark, scathing, grudging color of a colored soldier's wound coloring dirty white bandages wrapped around his dark chest. It was a clear afternoon a sax turned darker than the night. Color of all time. Vanished time. No time. Color of deep-purple swirls I mixed from ovals of pure, perfect color in the paint box I found under the Christmas tree one morning when I was a kid. An unexpected color with a will of its own brewed by a horn's laments, amens, witness. That's what I remember, anyway. Color of disappointment, of ancient injuries and bruises and staying alive and dying and being born again all at once after I had completed about half the first lap of a back-and-forth hump over the Williamsburg Bridge.

Walking the bridge an old habit now. One I share with numerous other walkers whose eyes avoid mine as I avoid theirs, our minds perhaps on the people down below, people alive and dead on tennis courts, ball fields, running tracks, swings, slides, jungle gyms, benches, chairs, blankets, grass plots, gray paths alongside the East River. Not exactly breaking news, is it, that from up here human beings seem as tiny as

ants. Too early this morning for most people or ants, but from this height, this perch beyond the walkway's fences, this railing along the edge of the Williamsburg Bridge, I see a few large ants or little people sprinkled here and there. Me way up here, ants and people way down there all the same size. Same weight. Same fate.

So here I am, determined to jump, telling myself, telling you, that I'm certain. Then what's the fool waiting for? it's fair for you to ask. In my defense I'll say I'm aware that my desire to be certain is an old-fashioned desire, "certain" an obsolete word in a world where I'm able only to approximate, at best, the color of a bridge I've crossed thousands of times, walked yesterday, today, a world where the smartest people acknowledge an uncertainty principle and run things accordingly and own just about everything and make fools of the vast majority of the rest of us not as smart, not willing to endure lives without certain certainties. I don't wish to be a victim, a complete dupe, and must hedge my bets, understand that certainty is always relative, and not a very kind, generous, loving relative I can trust. Which is to say, or rather to admit, that although I'm sure I'm up here and sure this edge is where I wish to be and sure of what I intend to do next, to be really certain, or as close to certain as you or I will ever get, certainty won't come till after the instant I let go.

Many years passed before I figured out it had to be Sonny Rollins I heard one afternoon. Do you know who I mean? Theodore Walter Rollins, born September 7, 1930, New York City, emerges early Fifties "most brash and creative young tenor player." Flees to Chicago to escape perils of N.Y.C. jazz scene, reemerges 1955 in N.Y.C. with Clifford Brown, Max Roach group—"caustic, often humorous style of melodic invention ... command of everything from arcane ballads to calypso." Nicknamed "Newk" for resemblance to Don Newcombe, star Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher. Produces string of great albums (1956–58). Withdraws again, no public performances (1959–61), practices on the Williamsburg Bridge "to get myself together" after "too much, too soon."

Brushes up on craft and returns with album, *The Bridge*. Another sabbatical, Japan, India (1969)—more time "to get myself together ... I think it's a good thing for anybody to do." Returns (1971) to perform publicly, etc., etc. All this information I quote available at Sonny Rollins website; cocaine addiction, ten months he did at Rikers for armed robbery not in website bio.

Once I decided it had to have been Sonny Rollins playing, my passion for his music escalated, as did my intimacy with the Williamsburg Bridge. Recently, trying to discover where it ranks among New York bridges in terms of its attractiveness to jumpers, I came across alexreisner.com and a story about a suicide in progress on the Williamsburg Bridge that Mr. Reisner claimed to have witnessed. Numerous black-and-white photos illustrate his piece. In some pictures a young colored man wears neatly cropped dreads, pale skin, pale undershorts, a bemused expression, light mustache, shadow of beard, his hands curled around a rail running along the outermost edge of the bridge where he sits. Water ripples behind, below, to frame him. His gaze downcast, engaged elsewhere, a place no one else on the planet can see. No people there, no time there where his eyes have drifted, settled. His features regular, handsome in a stiff, plain, old-fashioned way. Some mother's mixed son, mixed-up son.

If I could twist around, shift my weight without losing balance, rotate my head, and glance over my left shoulder, I'd see superimposed silhouettes of the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges downriver, grand cascades of steel cables draped from their towers, and over there, if I stay steady and focused, I could pick out the tip of the Statue of Liberty jutting just above the Brooklyn Bridge, Lady Liberty posed like sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the winners' stand at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, her torch a black-gloved fist rammed into the sky: We're number one. Up yours.

Dawns on me that I'll miss the next Olympics, next March Madness, next Super Bowl. Dawns on me that I won't regret missing them. A blessing. Free at last. Not up here because I didn't win a gold medal. Not up here to sell shoes or politics. Nor because my mom's French. Not here because of my color or lack of

color. My coloring pale like the young colored man in website photos who sat, I believe, precisely on the spot where I'm sitting. Color not the reason I'm here or the reason you are where you are, wherever you happen to be, whatever your color. Ain't about color. Speed what it's about. Color just a gleam in the beholder's eye. Now you see it, now you don't.

On the other hand, no doubt color does matter. My brownish skin, gift of the colored man my mother married,

tag my posture as effeminate. Truth is, with my upper body tilted slightly backward, weight poised on my rear end, arms thrust out to either side for balance, I must press my thighs together to maintain stability, keep my feet spread apart so they serve as bobbing anchors.

Try it sometime. Someplace high and dangerous, ideally. You'll get the point. Point being of course any position you assume up here unsafe. Like choice of a language, gender, color, etc. A person's forced to choose, forced to suffer the

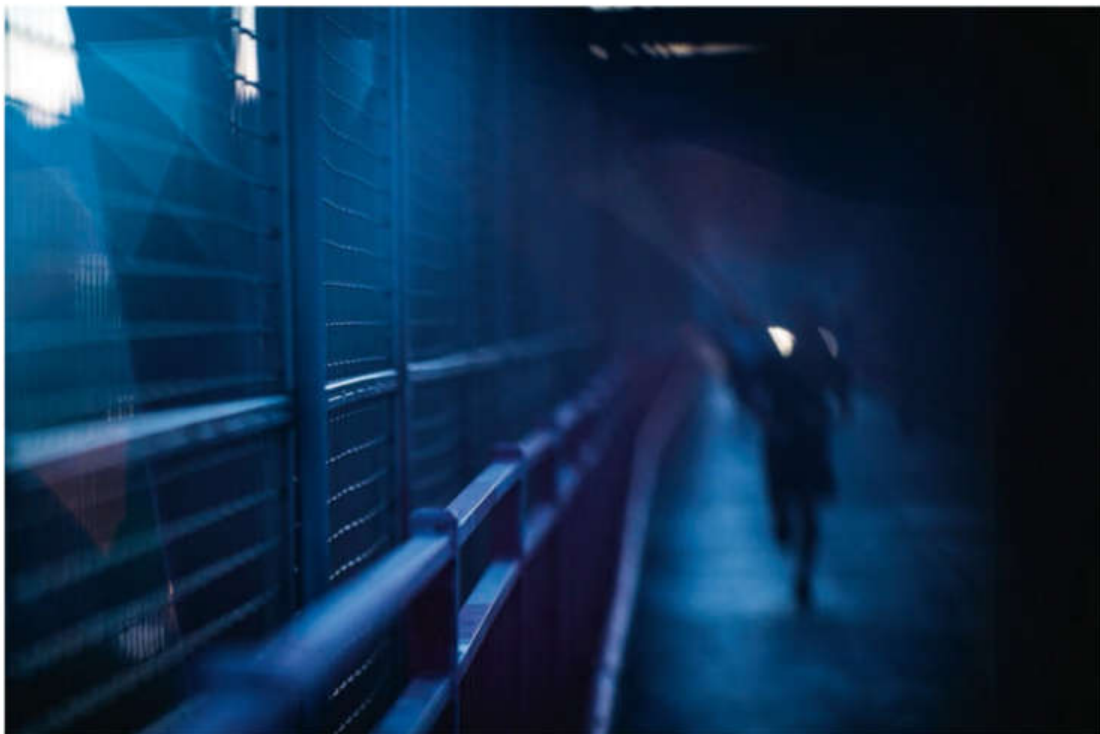
And contrary to what you might be thinking, loneliness has not driven me to the edge. I'm far from lonely. In addition to my undershorts I have pain, grief, plenty of regrets, and prospects of a dismal future to keep me company, and when not entertained sufficiently by those companions I look down below. Whole shitty world's at my feet. My chilly toes wiggle like antennae, chilly thighs squeeze together not because of fear or loneliness but like my mother's hands when they form a steeple, and

you might think she's about to pray, but then she chants: This is the church/Here's the steeple, a game Mom taught me in ancient days. I can't stop a grin spreading across my face even now, today, when she starts the rhyme, steeples her pale long elegant fingers. I'm a sucker every time.

Yes, Mom, one could say I drink a lot, Mom, and drink perhaps part of the problem, but not why I'm up here. Drink a bad habit, I admit. Like hiring a blind person to point out what my eyes miss. But drink simpatico, an old old cut buddy—I gape at his antics, the damage he causes, stunned by the ordinary when it shows itself through his eyes.

Only that, Mom. Nothing evil, nothing extreme, nothing more or less than the ordinary showing itself as a gift. The ordinary revealed when I'm drinking. You must know what I mean. I'm the hunter who wants to shoot it, wants to be eaten.

French my dead mother's mother tongue and occasionally I think in French. If another person appeared next to me sitting on the steel rail where I sit and the sudden person asked, What do you mean mother's tongue? What do you mean thinking in French? I would have to answer: To tell the truth, I don't know. Carefully speak the words aloud in English, those exact words repeated twice to keep track of language, of where I am,



confers added protection against sunburn in tropical climates and a higher degree of social acceptance generally in some nations or regions or communities within nations or regions where people more or less my color are the dominant majority. My color also produces in many people of other colors an adverse reaction hardwired. Thus color keeps me on my toes. Danger and treachery never far removed from any person's life regardless of color, but in my case danger and treachery are palpable, everyday presences. Unpleasant surprises life inflicts. No surprise at all. Color says, smiling, Told you so.

Gender not the reason I'm here either. A crying shame in this advanced day and age that plenty of people would

consequences. Like choosing which clothes to wear on the Williamsburg Bridge or not wear. I've chosen to keep my undershorts on. I want to be remembered as a swimmer, not some naked nut. Swimmer who has decided to swim away with dignity intact in homely but perfectly respectable boxers.

Just about naked also because I don't wish to be mistaken for a terrorist. No intent to harm a living soul. No traffic accidents, boat accidents caused by my falling body, heavier and heavier, they say, as it descends. No concealed weapons, no dynamite strapped around my bare belly. I've taken pains to situate myself on the bridge's outermost edge to maximize the chance I hit nothing but water.

to keep track of myself. Desperate to explain before we tumble off the edge. Desperate to translate a language one and only one person in the universe speaks, has ever spoken.

What words will I be saying to myself the instant I slip or pitch backward into the abyss? Will French words or Chinese or Yoruba make a difference? Will I return from the East River with a new language in my head, start up the universe again with new words, or do I leave it all behind, everything behind forever, the way thoughts leave me behind? East River behind me, below me. River showing off today. Chilly ripples scintillate under cold, intermittent sunshine. Water colors differently depending on point of view, light, wind, cosmic dissonance. Water shows all colors, no color, any color from impenetrable oily sludge to purest glimmer. Water a medium like white space yet white-space empty—thin ice, a blank page words sprint across until they vanish. White space disguises itself as spray, as froth, as bubbles, as a big white splash when I fall backward and land in the East River, my ass-backward swan

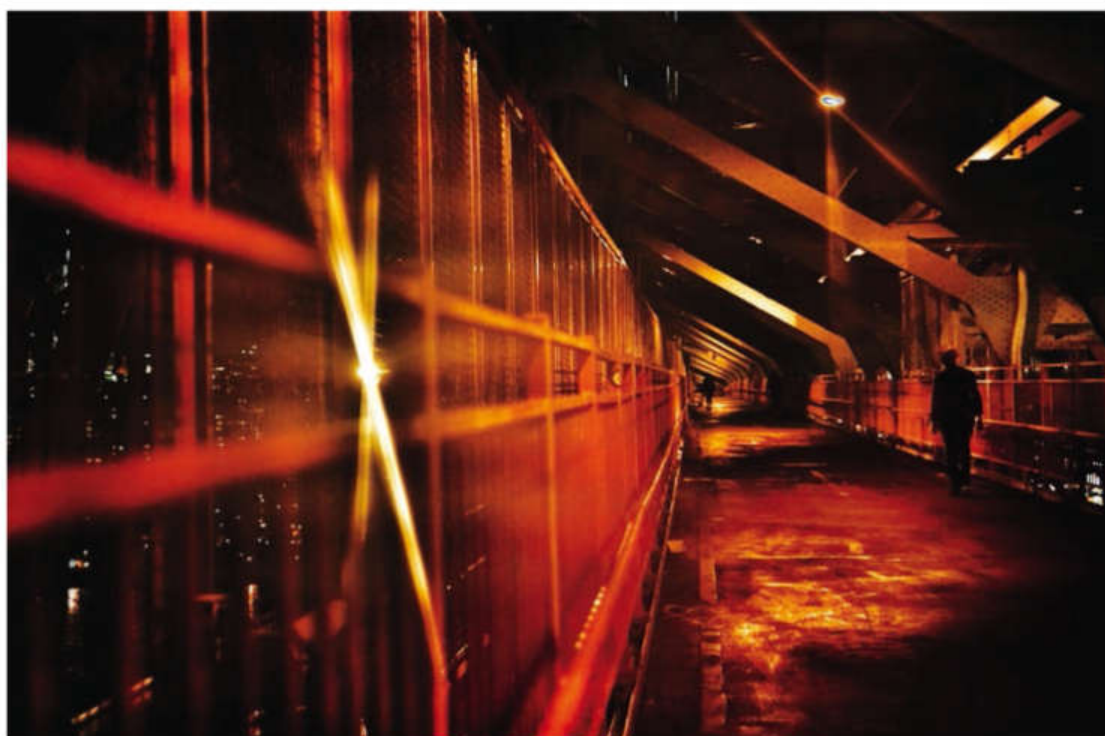
dive, swan song greeted by white applause, a bouquet of white flames while deep down below, white space swallows, burps, closes blacker than night.

With my fancy new phone I googled the number of suicides each day in America. By speaking a few words into my phone I learned 475 suicides per year, 1.3 daily in New York City. With a few more words or clicks one could learn yearly rate of suicide in most countries of the civilized world. Data more difficult obviously to access from prehistory, the bad old days before a reliable someone started counting everything, keeping score of every-

thing, but even ancient numbers available I discover if you ask a phone the correct questions in the proper order, answers supplied by sophisticated algorithms that estimate within a hairsbreadth, no doubt, unknown numbers from the past. Lots of statistics re suicide, but I could not locate the date of the very first suicide or find a chat room or blog offering lively debate on the who, when, why, where of the original suicide. You'd think someone would

point spark of dazzle ascending the heavens, wake spreading behind it, an invisible band of light that expands slowly, surely as milky-white wakes of water taxis that pass beneath the bridge, expand and shiver to the ends of the universe.

Sometimes it feels like I've been sitting up here forever. An old, weary ear worn out by nagging voices nattering inside and outside it. Other times I feel brand-new, as if I've just arrived or not quite here yet, never will be. Lots to



care about such a transformative achievement, or at least an expert would claim credit for unearthing the first suicide's name and address, posting it for posterity.

Suicide of course a morbid subject. Who would want to know too much about it? I'm much more curious about immortality and rapture. If a person intent on suicide is also seeking rapture, why not choose the Williamsburg Bridge. Like the young man in the website photos who probably believed his fall, his rapture, would commence immersed within the colors of Sonny Rollins's tenor sax, Sonny's music first and last thing heard as water splashes open and seals itself. Rapture rising, a pin-

read here, plenty of threats, promises, advice, prophecies in various colors, multiple scripts scrawled, scrolled, stenciled, sprayed on the walkway's blackboard of pavement. I've read that boys in Central Asia duel with kites of iridescent rainbow colors, a razor fixed to each kite's string to decide who's king. Clearly my kite's been noticed. Don't you see them? Bridge crawling with creepy cops in jumpsuits, a few orange, most the color of roaches. Swarms of them, sneaky fast and brutal as always. They clamber over barriers, scuttle across girders, shimmy up cables, skulk behind buttresses, swing on ropes like Spider-Man. A chopper circles. One cop hoots through a bullhorn. Will they shoot me off the bridge like they

blasted poor, lovesick King Kong off the Empire State Building? Cop vehicles, barricades, flashing lights clog arteries that serve the bridge and its network of expressways, thruways, overpasses, and underpasses that should be pumping traffic noise and carbon monoxide to keep me company up here.

With a cell phone, if I could manage to dial it without dumping my ass in the frigid East River, I could call 9-1-1, leave a number for SWAT teams in the field to reach me up here, an opportunity for opposing parties to conduct a civilized conversation this morning instead of screaming back and forth like fishwives. My throat hoarse already, eyes tearing in the wicked wind. I threaten to let go and plunge into the water if they encroach one inch further into my territory, my show this morning.

Small clusters of people-ants peer up at me now. What do they think they see tottering on the edge of the Williamsburg Bridge? They appear to stare intently, concerned, curious, amused, though I've read numerous species of ant and certain specialists within numerous ant species are nearly blind. Nature not wasting eyes on lives spent entirely in the dark, but nature generous too, provides ants with antennae as proxies for vision and we get cell phones to cope with the blues.

Shared cell-phone blues once with a girlfriend I had high hopes for once who told me about a lover once, her Michelangelo, gorgeous, she said, a rod on him hard as God's wrath, is how she put it, a pimp who couldn't understand why she got so upset when he conducted business by cell phone while lying naked next to naked her, a goddamn parade of women coming and going in my bedroom and Michelangelo chattering away as if I don't exist, him without a clue he was driving me crazy jealous, she said, her with no clue how crazy jealous it was driving me—the lethal combination of my unhealthy curiosity and her innocent willingness to regale me with details of her former intimacies, her chattering away on her end and me listening on mine connected and unconnected.

Not expecting a call up here. If I could explain white space, perhaps I could convince everyone down there

to take a turn up here. Not that it's comfortable here, no reasonable person would wish to be in my shoes, I'm not even wearing shoes, tossed overboard with socks, sweatshirt, jeans, jacket, beret, stripped down to skivvies, and intermittent sunshine the forecast promised not doing the trick. Each time a cloud slides between me and the sun, wind chills my bare skin, my bones shiver. On the other hand, the very last thing any human being should desire is comfort. World's too dangerous. Comfort never signifies less peril, less deceit, it only means your guard's down, your vigilance faltering.

On the bridge one day dark, thick clouds rolling in fast, sky almost black at two in the afternoon, I caught a glimpse of a man reflected in a silvery band of light that popped up solid as a mirror for an instant parallel to the walkway's fence, a momentary but crystal-clear image of a beat-up, hunched-over colored guy in a beret, baggy gray sweats, big ugly sneakers scurrying across the Williamsburg Bridge, an old gray person beside me nobody loves and he loves nobody, might as well be dead, who would know or care if he was dead or wasn't, and this man scurrying stupid as an ant in a box, back and forth, back and forth between walls it can't scale is me, a lonely, aging person trapped in a gray city, a vicious country, scurrying back and forth as if scurrying might change his fate, and I think, What a pitiful creature, what a miserable existence, it doesn't get any worse than this shit, and then it does get worse, icy pellets of rain start pelting me, but between stinging drops a bright idea—universe bigger than N.Y.C., bigger than America, get out of here, get away, take a trip, visit Paris again, and even before the part about where the fuck's the money coming from, I'm remembering I detest tourism, tourists worse than thieves in my opinion, evil and dangerous because tourists steal entire lands and cultures, strip them little by little, stick in their pockets everything they can cart back home and exchange for other commodities until other lands and cultures emptied and vanished, tourists like false-hearted lovers worse than thieves in the old

song, you know how it goes, a thief will just rob you and take what you have, but a false-hearted lover will lead you to the grave.

Once upon a long time ago I had hopes love might help. Shared rapture once with a false-hearted lover. I'll start with your toes, she whispered, start with your cute crooked toes, she says, your funny crooked toes with undersides same color as mine, skin on top a darker color than mine, and when I'm finished with your toes, she promises, my false-hearted lover promises, I'll do the rest. Hours and hours later she's still doing toes, she's in no hurry and neither am I. Enraptured. Toes tingle, aglow. How many toes do I own? However many, I wished for more and one toe also more than enough, toe she's working on makes me forget its ancestors, siblings, posterity, forget everything. Bliss will never end. I read *War and Peace*, *Dhalgren*, *Don Quixote*, and think I'll start Proust next after I finish *Cane* or has it been Sonny Rollins's mellow sax, not written words, accompanying work she's busy doing down there. Whole body into it, every tentacle, orifice, treacherous inner wetness, hers, mine. Time seemed to stop, as during a yawn, blink, death, rapture, as in those apparently permanent silences between two consecutive musical notes Sonny Rollins or Thelonious Monk blew, or between heartbeats, hers, mine, ours. A hiccuping pause, hitch, an extenuating circumstance.

It's afterward and also seamlessly before she starts on my toes and she's still in no hurry. No hurry in her voice the day that very same false-hearted lover tells me she's falling ... slipped out of love.

Shame on me but I couldn't help myself, shouted her words back in her face. Who wouldn't need to scream, to grab her, shake her, search for a reflection in the abyss of her eyes, in the dark mirror of white space. I plunged, kicked, flailed, swallowed water, wind, freezing rain.

Sad but true, some people born unlucky in love, and if you're jinxed that

way it seems never to get any better. No greeting this morning from my neighbor ghost, not even a goodbye wave. Can't say what difference it might have made if she had appeared, I simply register my regret and state the fact she was a no-show again this morning in the naked space above her window's bottom ledge.

We speak politely in the elevator, nod or smile or wave on streets surrounding the vast apartment complex or when we cross paths in the drab lobby of section C of the building we share. Not very long after I moved into my fifteenth-floor one-bedroom, kitchenette and bath, the twin towers still lurked at the island's tip, biggest bullies on the block after blocks of skyscrapers, high-rises, the spectacle still novel to my eyes, so much city out the window, its size and sprawl and chaos would snag my gaze, stop me in my tracks, especially the endless sea of glittering lights at night, and for the millisecond or so it took to disentangle a stare, my body would expand, fly apart, each particle seeking out its twin among infinite particles of city, and during one such pause, from the corner of one eye as I returned to the building, the room, I glimpsed what might have been the blur of a white nightgown or blur of a pale, naked torso fill the entire bright window just beyond my kitchenette window, a woman's shape I was sure, so large, vital, near, my neighbor must have been pressing her skin against the cool glass, a phantom disappearing faster than I could focus, then gone when a venetian blind's abrupt descent cut off my view, all but a thirty-inch-wide band of emptiness in my neighbor's window, increasingly familiar and intimate as the years passed.

What if she had known that today her last chance. A showing as in Pentecost. No different this morning, though it's my last. Her final chance, too. Sad she didn't know. Too bad I won't be around tomorrow to tell her so we can be unhappy about it together, laugh about it together. Her name, if I knew it, on the note I won't write and leave behind for posterity.

Posterity. Pentecost. With a phone I could review both etymologies. Considered bringing a phone. Not really. Phone would tempt me to linger, call someone. One last call. To whom? No phone. Nowhere to put it if I had one. Maybe tucked in the waistband of my shorts. Little tuck of belly already stretching the elastic. Vanity versus necessity. So what if I bulge. But how to manage a call if I had a phone and someone to call. Freeing my hands would mean letting go of the thick railing, an unadvisable maneuver. Accidental fall funny. Not my intent. Would spoil my show. A flawless Pentecost this morning, please.

"Posterity," "Pentecost": old-fashioned words hoisting themselves up on crutches, rattling, sighing their way through alleys and corridors of steel girders' struts, trusses, concrete piers. Noisy chaos of words graffitied on the pedestrian walkway: DHEADT REFUSE, EAT ME, JEW YORK, POOP DICK DAT BITCH, HONDURAS. Ominous silence of highway free of traffic as it never is except rarely after hours, and even during the deepest predawn quiet a lone car will blast across or weave drunkenly from lane to lane as if wincing from blows of wind howling, sweeping over the Williamsburg Bridge.

"Why" the most outmoded, most vexing word. Staggering across the Williamsburg Bridge one morning, buffeted by winds from every direction, headwind stiff enough to support my weight, leaning into it at a forty-five-degree angle, blinded by the tempest, flailing, fearing the undertow, the comic-strip head-over-heels liftoff, and I asked myself, Why the fuck are you up here, jackass, walking the bridge in this godforsaken weather, and that question—why—drumming in my eardrums, the only evidence of my sanity I was able to produce.

Why not let go. Fly away from this place where I teeter and totter, shiver, hold on to a cold iron rail, thighs pressed together, fingers numb from gripping, toes frozen stiff, no air in my lungs.

Always someone's turn at the edge. Are you grateful it's me not you today? Perhaps I'm your proxy. During the Civil War a man drafted into the Union

Army could pay another man to enlist in his place. This quite legal practice of hiring a proxy to avoid a dangerous obligation of citizenship enraged those who could not afford the luxury, and to protest draft laws that in effect exempted the rich while the poor were compelled to serve as cannon fodder in Mr. Lincoln's bloody unpopular war, mobs rioted in several northern cities, most famously here in New York, where murderous violence lasted several days, ending only after federal troops were dispatched to halt the killing, beating, looting, burning.

Poor people of color by far the majority of the so-called draft riot's victims. A not unnatural consequence given the fact mobs could not get their hands on wealthy men who had hired proxies and stayed behind the locked doors of their substantial estates in substantial neighborhoods protected by armed guards during the civil unrest. Colored people on the other hand easy targets. Most resided in hovels alongside hovels of poor whites, thus readily accessible, more or less simple to identify, and none of them possessed rights a white man was required by law or custom to respect. Toll of colored lives heavy. I googled it.

So much killing, dying, and after all, a proxy's death can't save a person's life. Wall Street brokers who purchased exemption from death in the killing fields of Virginia didn't buy immortality. Whether Christ died for our sins or not, each of us obligated to die. On the other hand, the moment you learn your proxy killed in action at Gettysburg, wouldn't it feel a little like stealing a taste of immortality? Illicit rapture. If suicide a crime, shouldn't martyrdom be illegal, too? Felony or misdemeanor? How many years for attempted martyrdom?

When you reach the edge you must decide to go further or not, to be free or not. If you hesitate you get stuck like the unnamed fair-skinned young colored man in Reisner's photos. Better to let go quickly and maybe you will rise higher and higher because that's what happens sometimes when you let go—rapture. Why do fathers build wings if they don't want sons to fly; why do mothers bear sons if they don't want sons to die.

When I let go and topple backward, will I cause a splash, leave a mark? After the hole closes, how will the cops locate me? I regret not having answers. The plunge backward off my perch perhaps the last indispensable piece of research. As Zora Neale Hurston said, You got to go there to know there.

But no. Not yet. I'm in no hurry this morning. Not afraid either. I may be clutching white-knuckled onto the very edge of a very high bridge, but I don't fear death, don't feel close to death. I felt more fear of death, much closer to death, on numerous occasions. Closest one summer evening under streetlights in the park in the ghetto where I used to hoop. Raggedy outdoor court, a run available every evening except on summer weekends when the high-fliers owned it. A daily pickup game for older gypsies like me wandering in from various sections of the city, for youngblood wannabes from the neighborhood, local has-beens and never-wases, a run perfect for my mediocre, diminishing skills, high-octane fantasies, and aging body that enjoyed pretending to be in superb condition, at least for the first five or six humps up and down the cyclone-fenced court, getting off with the other players as if it's the NBA Finals. Ferocious play war, harmless fun unless you get too enthusiastic, one too many flashbacks to glory days that never existed, and put a move on somebody that puts you out of action a couple weeks, couple months, for good if you aren't careful. Anyway, one evening a hopped-up gangster and his crew cruise up to the court in a black, glistening Lincoln SUV. Bogart winners and our five well on the way to delivering the righteous ass-kicking the chumps deserved for stealing a game from decent folks waiting in line for a turn. Mr. Bigtime, big mouth, big butt, dribbles the ball off his foot, out of bounds, and calls a foul. Boots the pill to the fence. Waddling after it, he catches up and plants a foot atop it. Tired of this punk-ass, jive-ass run, he announces. Motherfucker over, motherfuckers. Then he unzips the kangaroo pouch of his blimpy sweat top he probably never sheds no

matter how hot on the court because it hides a tub of jelly-belly beneath it, and from the satiny pullover extracts a very large pistol, steps back, nudges the ball forward with his toe, and—*Pow*—kills the poor thing as it tries to roll away. *Pow—Pow—Pow*—starts to shooting up the court. Everybody running, ducking to get out of the way. G'wan home, niggers. Ain't no more goddamn game today. *Pow*. King of the court, ruler of the hood. Busy as he is during his rampage, brother finds time to wave his rod in my direction. What you looking at, you yellow-ass albino motherfucker. Gun steady an instant, pointed directly between my eyes long enough I'm certain he's going to blow me away and I just about wet myself. Truth be told, with that cannon in my mug maybe I did leak a little. In the poor light of the playground who could tell. Who cares, is what I was thinking if I was thinking anything at that moment besides dead. Who knows. Who cares. Certainly not me, not posterity, not the worker ants wearing rubber aprons and rubber gloves who'll dump my body on a slab at the morgue, drag off my sneakers, snip off my hoop shorts and undershorts with huge shears before they hose me down. Sweat or piss or shit or blood in my drawers. Who knows. Who cares.

A near-death experience I survived to write a story about, a story my mother reads and writes a note about on one of the pamphlets she saved in neat stacks on top of and under the night table beside her bed, each one containing Bible verses and commentary to put her to sleep.

I saw the note only after Mom died. A message evidently intended for my benefit, but she never got around to showing it to me. She had underlined words from Habakkuk, the pamphlet deemed appropriate for the first Sunday after Pentecost—"Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise—law becomes slack and justice never prevails... their own might is their God"—and in the pamphlet's margin she had printed a response to my story never shared with me.

Of course I had proudly presented a copy of the anthology containing my story to my mother, one of two



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complimentary copies, by the way all I ever received from the publisher as payment. Mom thanked me profusely, close to tears, I believe I recall, the day I placed the book in her hands, but afterward she never once mentioned my story. I found her note by chance years later when I was sorting through boxes full of her stuff, most of it long overdue to be tossed. Pamphlet in my hand and suddenly Mom appears. Immediately after reading her note, I rushed off to read all of Habakkuk in the beat-up, rubber band-bound Bible she had passed on to me, the Bible once belonging to my father's family, only thing of his she kept when he walked out of our lives, she said, and said he probably forgot it, left it behind in his rush to leave. I searched old journals of mine for entries recorded around the date of the pamphlet, date of my story's publication. After this flurry of activity, I just about wept. My mother a busy scribbler herself, I had discovered, but a no-show as far as ever talking about her writing or mine. Then a message after she's gone, ghost-message Mom doesn't show me till she's a ghost too: This reminds me of your story about playing ball.

Why hadn't she spoken to me? Did she understand, after all, my great fear and loneliness? How close I've always felt to death? Death up in my face on the playground in the park. Probably as near to death that moment as any living person gets. Closest I've ever felt to dying, that's for damn sure. So absolutely close and not even close at all, it turns out, 'cause here I sit.

Yo. You all down below. Don't waste your breath feeling sorry for me. Your behinds may hit the water before mine.

At the last minute, for comfort's sake, for the poetry of departing this world as naked as I arrived, maybe I will remove these boxers. Why worry about other people's reactions. Trying to please other people a waste of time at my age. I understand good and well my only captive audience is me. Any person paying too much attention to an incidental detail like shorts is dealing with her or his own problems, aren't they, and their problems by definition not mine. I have no words to soothe their pain.

Can't seem to get underwear off my brain this morning. Not mine,

we're finished with mine, I hope, though a woman's underwear that day in Paris, my undershorts today on the Williamsburg Bridge surprisingly similar, made of the same no-frills white cotton as little girls' drawers used to be. I'm seeing a lady's underwear and recalling another unlucky-in-love story. Last one I'll tell, I promise. A civil war precipitated by underwear. Not a murderous war like ours between the states. A small, bittersweet conflict. Tug-of-war when I pull down a lady's underwear and she resists.

I was young, testing unclear rules. I wished/wish to think of myself as a decent person, an equal partner, not a tyrant or exploiter in my exchanges with others, especially women. Which means that whatever transpired in Paris between a lady and me should have been her show, governed by her rules, but I was renting her time, thus proxy owner of her saffron skin, slim hips, breasts deep for a young woman. Why not play. Wrap a long, black, lustrous braid around my fist, pull her head gently back on her shoulders until her neck arches gracefully and she moans or whimpers deep in her throat.

I asked her name and when she didn't respond immediately, I repeated my French phrase—*Comment t'appelles-tu*—more attention to pronunciation since she was obviously of Asian descent, a recent immigrant or illegal, maybe, and perhaps French not her native language. Ana, I thought she replied, after I asked a second, slower time. Then I shared my name, and said I'm American, a black American—*noir*, I said, in case my pale color confused her. I asked her country of origin—*De quel pays?* Another slight hesitation on her side before she said *Chine*—or she could have said Ana again or the first Ana could have been China, I realized later. Her name a country. Country's name spoken in English, then French, an answer to both my inquiries.

Her eagerness to please teased me with the prospect that perhaps no rules need inhibit my pleasure. I assumed all doors open if a generous enough tip was added to the fee already collected by a fortyish woman on a sofa at the massage parlor's entrance on Rue Duranton. In my mind, only unresolved issue the exact amount of *pourboire*. I didn't wish to spoil our encounter with market-stall

haggling, so like any good translator I settled for approximate equivalences, and we performed a short, silent charade of nods, looks, winks, hands, blinks, fingers to express sums and simulate acts, both of us smiling as we worked.

I trusted our bargain had reduced her rules to only one rule I needed to respect: pay and you can play. Her bright, black eyes seemed to agree. Resistance, they said, just part of the game, Monsieur. Just be patient, *s'il vous plaît*. Play along. I may pretend to plead—no no no no—when your fingers touch my underwear, but please persist, test me.

Easy as pie for a while. Underwear slid down her hips to reveal an edge of dark pubic crest. Then not so easy after she flops down on the floor next to the mat, curls up knees to chest, and emits a small, stifled cry. Then it's inch by inch until underwear finally dangled from one bobbing ankle, snapped off finally and tossed aside. A minute more and not a bit of shyness.

Wish I could say I knew better. Knew when to stop, whether I paid or not for the privilege of going further. Wish I believed now that we were on the same page then. But no. Like most of us, I behaved inexcusably. Believed what I wanted to believe. Copped what I could because I could. No thought of limits, boundaries. Hers or mine. No fear of AIDS back then. Undeterred by the threat of hordes of Chinese soldiers blowing bugles, firing burp guns as they descend across the Yalu River to attack stunned U.S. troops, allies of the South in a civil war, Americans who had advanced a bridge too far north and found themselves stranded, trapped, mauled, shivering, bleeding, dying in snowdrifts beside the frozen Chosin Reservoir.

No regrets, no remorse until years later, back home again, and one afternoon Sonny Rollins practicing changes on the Williamsburg Bridge halts me dead in my tracks. Big colors, radiant bucketfuls splash my face. I spin, swim in colors. Enraptured. Abducted by angels who lift me by my droopy wings up, up, and away. Then they let go and I fall, plunge deeper and deeper into swirling darkness.

Am I remembering it right, getting the story, the timing right, the times, the Fifties, Sixties, everything runs together, happens at once, explodes, scatters. I will have to check my journals. Google.

Too young for Korea, too old for Iraq, student deferments during Vietnam. Emmett Till's exact age in 1955, not old enough to enlist or be on my own in New York City, slogging daily like it's a job back and forth across the Williamsburg Bridge those years of Sonny's first sabbatical. When I hurried back to Rue Durant on next morning to apologize or leave a larger tip, it was raining. No Ana works here, I believe the half-asleep women on the sofa said.

I wish these dumb undershorts had pockets. Many deep, oversize pockets like camouflage pants young people wear. I could have loaded them with stones.

Before I go, let me confide my final regret: I'm sorry I'll miss my agent's birthday party. To be more exact, it's my agent's house in Montauk I regret missing. Love my agent's house. Hundreds of rooms, marvelous ocean views, miles and miles of wooded grounds. One edge of the property borders a freshwater pond where wild animals come to drink, including timid, quivering deer. Stayed once for a week alone, way back when before my agent had kids. Quick love affair with Montauk, a couple of whose inhabitants had sighted the *Amistad* with its cargo of starving, thirsty slaves in transit between two of Spain's New World colonies, slaves who had revolted and killed most of the ship's crew, the *Amistad* stranded off Montauk Point with a few surviving sailors at the helm, alive only because they promised to steer the ship to Africa, though the terrified Spaniards doing their best to keep the *Amistad* as far away from the dark continent as Christopher Columbus had strayed from the East Indies when he landed by mistake on a Caribbean island.

I know more than enough, more than I want to know, about the *Amistad* revolt. Admire Melville's remake of the incident in *Benito Cereno* but not tempted to write about it myself. One major disincentive the irony of African captives who after years of tribulations and trials in New England courts were granted freedom, repatriated to Africa, and became slave merchants. Princely, eloquent Cinqué, mastermind of the shipboard rebellion, one of the bad guys. Cinqué, nom de guerre of Patty Hearst's

kidnapper. Not a pretty ending to the *Amistad* story. Is that why I avoided writing it? Is the Williamsburg Bridge a pretty ending? Yes or no, it's another story I won't write.

Under other circumstances, revisiting my agent's fabulous house, the ocean, memories of an idyll in Montauk might be worth renting a car, inching along in bumper-to-bumper weekend traffic through the gilded Hamptons. My agent's birthday after all. More friend than agent for years now. We came up in the publishing industry together. Rich white kid, poor black kid, a contrasting pair of foundlings, misfits, mavericks, babies together at the beginning of careers. *Muy simpático*. Nearly the same age, fans of Joyce, Beckett, Dostoevsky, Hart Crane. (If this were a time and place for footnotes, I'd quote Crane's most celebrated poem, "The Bridge"—"Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft/A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets/Tilting there momentarily"—and add the fact that Crane disappeared after he said, "Goodbye—goodbye—goodbye, everybody," and jumped off a boat into the Gulf of Mexico.) We also shared a fondness for Stoli martinis in which three olives replaced dry vermouth, and both of us loved silly binges of over-the-top self-importance, daydreaming, pretending to be high rollers, blowing money neither had earned on meals in fancy restaurants, until I began to suspect the agency's charge card either bottomless or fictitious, maybe both. *Muy simpático* even after his star had steadily risen, highest roller among his peers, while my star dimmed precipitously, surviving on welfare, barely aglow. How long since my agent has sold a major piece of my writing, how long since I've submitted a major new piece to sell? In spite of all of the above, still buddies. Regret missing his party, Montauk, the house. House partly mine, after all. My labor responsible for earning a minuscule percentage of the down payment, *n'est-ce pas*? For nine months of the year no one inhabits the Montauk mansion. In France vacant dwellings are white space poor people occupy and claim, my mother had once informed me. Won't my agent's family be surprised next June to find my ghost curled up in his portion of the castle.

Last time in Montauk was when? Harder and harder to match memories

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with dates. One event or incident seems to follow another, but often I misremember, dates out of sync. Sonny Rollins's sax squats on the Williamsburg Bridge, changes the sky's color, claims ownership of a bright day. Was I in fact walking the bridge those years Sonny Rollins woodshedding up there? I'll have to check my journals. But the oldest journals temporarily unavailable, part of the sample loaned to my agent to shop around.

I'm sure I can find a university happy to pay to archive your papers, he said.

Being archived a kind of morbid thought, but go right ahead, my friend. Fuckers don't want to pay for my writing while I'm alive, maybe if I'm dead they'll pay.

Stoppit. Nobody's asking you to jump off a bridge. Nothing morbid about selling your papers. Same principle involved as selling backlist.

So do it, okay. Still sounds like desperation to me, like a last resort.

Just the opposite. I tempt publishers with posterity, remind them the best writing, best music, never ages. Don't think in terms of buying, I lecture the pricks. Think investment. Your great-great-grandkids will dine sumptuously off the profits.

Truth is, I've got nothing to sell except white space. You know what I mean: white space. Where print lives. What eats print. White space. That Pakistani guy who wrote the bestseller about black holes. Prize client of yours, isn't he? Don't try and tell me you or all the people buying the book understand black holes. Black holes. White space. White holes. Black space. What's the difference?

White space could be a bigger blockbuster than black holes. No words ... just white space. Keep my identity a secret. No photos, no interviews, no distracting particulars of color, gender, age, class, national origin. Anonymity will create mystery, complicity—white space everybody's space, everybody welcome, everybody will want a copy.

The *Amistad* packed with corpses and ghosts drifts offshore behind me. Ahoy, I holler and wave at two figures way up the beach. No clue where we've landed. I'm thinking water, food, rescue, maybe we won't starve or

die of thirst after all. The thought dizzying like too much drink too fast after debilitating days of drought. Water, death roil around in the same empty pit inside me. The two faraway figures scarecrows silhouetted against a gray horizon. They must be on the crest of a rise and I'm in a black hole staring up. Like me they've halted. I'm not breathing, no water sloshing inside me, no waves slap my bare ankles, roar of ocean subsided to a dull flat silence, my companions not fussing, not clamoring out of the flimsy rowboat behind me. Everybody, everything in the universe frozen. Some fragile yet deep abiding protocol, ironclad rules obscure and compelling, oblige me to wait, not to speak or breathe until those alien others whose land this must be wave or run away or beckon, draw swords, fire muskets.

The pair of men steps in our direction, then more steps across the whitish gray. They are in booths making calls, counting, calculating with each approaching step, each wobble, what it might be worth, how much bounty in shiny pieces of silver and gold they could collect in exchange for bodies, a rowboat, a sailing ship that spilled us hostage on this shore.

My friends, calls out the taller one in a frock coat, gold watch on a chain, his first words same words Horatio Seymour, governor of New York, addressed in 1863 to a mob of hungover, mostly Irish immigrants, their hands still red from three or four days of wasting colored children, women, and men in draft riots.

I'm going to go now. What took you so long? I bet you're thinking, or maybe you wonder why, why this moment—and since you've stuck with me this long, I owe you more—so I'll end with what I said to my false-hearted lover in one of our last civil conversations when she asked, What's your worst nightmare? Never seeing you again. Come on. Seriously. Seeing you again. Stop playing and be serious. Okay. Serious. Very super-serious. My worst nightmare is being cured. Cured of what? What I am. Of myself. Cured of yourself? Right. Cured of who I am. Cured of what doesn't fit, of what's inappropriate and maybe dangerous inside me.

You know. Cured like people they put away—far away behind bars, stone walls, people they put in chains, beat, shock with electric prods, drugs, exile to desert-island camps in Madagascar or camps in snowiest Siberia or shoot, starve, hang, gas, burn, or stuff with everything everybody believes desirable and then display them in store windows, billboard ads, on TV, in movies, like perfectly stuffed lifelike animated cartoon animals.

Lying naked in bed next to naked her I said my worst nightmare not the terrible cures or fear I fit in society's category of people needing cures. Worst nightmare not damage I might perpetrate on others or myself. Worst nightmare, my love, the thought I might live a moment too long. Wake up one morning cured and not know I'm cured.

Ps. The other day, believe it or not, I saw a woman scaling the bridge's outermost restraining screen. Good taste or not I ran toward her shouting my intention to write a story about a person jumping off the Williamsburg Bridge, imploring her as I got closer for a quote. "Fuck off, buddy," she said over her naked shoulder. Then she said: "Splash." ■

November Index Sources

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RETHINKING EXTINCTION

Toward a less gloomy environmentalism

By James K. Boyce

A little more than a hundred years ago, a bird named Martha, the last surviving passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo. Her death was remarkable in the annals of extinction not only because we know its precise date—September 1, 1914—but also because only decades earlier the passenger pigeon had been the most abundant bird on earth. Martha's demise helped to transform American beliefs about our relationship with nature, and the bird became an icon in the environmental movement, which was emerging just as she died.

Among the many billions of passenger pigeons who predeceased Martha was her cage mate, George, who died in 1910. The pair were named after Martha and George Washington. In the century that separated the first First Lady from the last passenger pigeon, the American economy went through a profound transformation. The country's population increased more than tenfold, and average income more than quadrupled. Only 6 percent of Americans lived in cities when Martha Washington died, in 1802. In 1914, the number was closer to 50 percent. The passenger pigeon's extinction was bound up with these changes,

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and what happened to the bird tells us much about what happened—and is still happening—to us.

Tourists came from near and far to see Martha after George's death. The



aerial displays of passenger pigeons had astonished their parents and grandparents, but at the zoo they found a pathetic creature with “drooping wings, atremble with the palsy of extreme old age,” in the words of a reporter. To dissuade the public from flinging sand at her to make her move, the zookeepers roped off her cage.

After her death, Martha was frozen in a 300-pound block of ice and shipped to the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington. Her internal organs were removed and preserved in the museum's “wet collections,” and her skin was stuffed and mounted for display. In 1977, when the Cincinnati Zoo opened a passenger-pigeon memorial, Martha was flown in for the dedication ceremony. She traveled first class.

The species at greatest risk for extinction tend to be small, geographically isolated populations: of the 140 documented bird extinctions since the sixteenth century, 133 were species found only on islands. The passenger pigeon was different. Unlike, say, the black mamo, which was endemic to the island of Molokai in the Hawaiian archipelago and went extinct around the same time, the pigeon had a range that covered most of the United States and Canada east of the Rockies, north of the Gulf of Mexico, and south of Hudson Bay. And its sheer numbers were almost beyond belief.

The ornithologist Alexander Wilson, writing at the dawn of the nineteenth century, described a flock crossing the Ohio River:

A column, eight or ten miles in length, would appear from Kentucky ... steering across to Indiana. The leaders of this great body would



sometimes gradually vary their course, until it formed a large bend, of more than a mile in diameter, those behind tracing the exact route of their predecessors. This would continue sometimes long after both extremities were beyond the reach of sight, so that the whole, with its glittery undulations, marked a space on the face of the heavens resembling the windings of a vast and majestic river.

Wilson estimated the number of pigeons in the flock using its density, breadth, speed, and the time it took to pass overhead, and came up with a count of 2,230,272,000. In *Birds and People* (2013), Mark Cocker, a British naturalist, concludes that while this was probably an overestimate, Wilson had undoubtedly seen “well over a billion birds.” And that

was just one flock; at any given time several were likely to have existed on the continent, plus a scattering of smaller groups and individuals.

A. W. Schorger, whose 1955 monograph on the passenger pigeon is the most exhaustive—some might say obsessive—assemblage of information about the species, reckoned that its total population when Europeans first



reached America was 3 to 5 billion. To put this number in perspective, the current worldwide population of rock doves—what most people recognize as pigeons—is around 260 million.

The passenger pigeon is held in tender regard by environmentalists today, but it is worth pausing to imagine the birds in their heyday. The majestic rivers in the sky could

inspire not only awe but also dread. When a flock appeared in Columbus, Ohio, in the spring of 1855, and blotted out the sun, “Children screamed and ran for home,” according to an account published years later in the *Columbus Dispatch*. “Women gathered their long skirts and hurried for the shelter of stores. Horses bolted. A few people mumbled frightened

words about the approach of the millennium, and several dropped on their knees and prayed.”

The birds roosted and nested in enormous colonies. The largest on record, found in central Wisconsin in 1871, extended for 850 square miles. As many as 300 birds would alight in a single tree, shattering trunks and branches with an effect that was

likened to that of a tornado or hurricane. The clearings the pigeons created were soon populated by species that did not thrive in dense forest. The fuel buildup from broken limbs increased the intensity of fires. Pigeon excrement altered the nutrient balance of the soil. The birds' heavy consumption of red-oak acorns is believed to have tilted the composition of eastern forests in favor of white oaks. In these respects, the passenger pigeon was a

lost species: the mastodon and the mammoth. By 1812, when he published a landmark four-volume treatise on fossil animals, he and others had identified forty-nine vanished species, including a cave bear, a pygmy hippopotamus, and a pterodactyl.

Cuvier's discovery touched off a revolution in our understanding of nature that is still, in some ways, incomplete. In the years that followed his treatise, debate raged over the

As Elizabeth Kolbert recounts in *The Sixth Extinction* (2014), Cuvier's discovery of extinction opened the door to Darwin's discovery of evolution. If old species could disappear, maybe new species could emerge. Darwin's theory of natural selection put the two processes together. In Kolbert's words, "Extinction and evolution were to each other the warp and weft of life's fabric." But Darwin, like Lyell, believed that the process of extinction



keystone species, which helped shape the ecosystems of eastern North America.

We now know that 99.9 percent of all species that ever existed are extinct. But until the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that *any* species had gone extinct was almost unknown. Nature was seen as a steady state, an unchanging tableau, not a process. Thomas Jefferson, whose passions included natural history, put it this way:

Such is the economy of nature that no instance can be produced of her having permitted any one race of her animals to become extinct; of her having formed any link in her great work so weak as to be broken.

The discovery of extinction is generally credited to Georges Cuvier, who taught at the Museum of Natural History in Paris and, in his spare time, studied the ancient bones in its collection. In 1796, Cuvier delivered a public lecture in which he announced that he had identified two

causes of extinction. Cuvier believed that extinctions were the result of planetary catastrophes, a view compatible with the Bible's great deluge. Within a few decades, however, an alternative view propounded by the Scottish geologist Charles Lyell had won the day. Lyell argued that extinction happened gradually, over millennia, not in cataclysmic spasms. It would not be until 1980, when a study connected the extinction of the dinosaurs to the impact of an asteroid, that the possibility of abrupt mass extinction was again taken seriously.

Scientists now recognize that both mass and gradual extinctions have occurred. Mass extinctions get more press: five of them are known to have happened so far, and some say we are now embarking on a sixth, with humans playing the part of the asteroid. Yet scientists have calculated that the Big Five together account for only 4 percent of the extinctions that have taken place over the past 600 million years. The rest occurred in the absence of a global cataclysm.

was so gradual as to be practically imperceptible. The idea that a mass extinction could happen in our own time, and that we could cause it, required a mental leap that even Darwin wouldn't take.

The birds that most of us eat today are chickens—lots of them—and turkeys, with the occasional duck, quail, or pheasant thrown in. So it is something of a shock to remember that, not so long ago, Americans were happy to eat just about anything with wings. An 1867 inventory of fowl available in the game markets of New York City and Boston featured not only wild turkeys, partridges, and grouse but also robins, great blue herons, sandpipers, meadowlarks, blue jays, and snow buntings.

In season, passenger pigeons were especially plentiful. Alexander Wilson reported they were sometimes eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The pigeon potpie—sometimes garnished with pigeon feet stuck in the middle—was common fare in colonial America. Passenger pigeons

Left: A group of pigeons, including several passenger pigeons, that lived in captivity in the aviary of C. O. Whitman, professor of zoology at the University of Chicago, 1896. Photograph by J. G. Hubbard. Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society. Right: *Passenger Pigeon Net*, by James Pattison Cockburn. Courtesy Library and Archives Canada

were preserved for out-of-season consumption by being salted, pickled in apple cider, smoked to make jerky, or sealed in casks with molten fat.

According to Schorger, the birds were “a boon to the poor”: in 1754, a half dozen sold in New York for a penny, a sum equivalent to thirty cents today. In times of surplus, they were fed to hogs.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, railroads had connected the cities of the eastern seaboard to the great nesting colonies of the Midwest. Word of the flocks’ locations spread rapidly thanks to another new technology, the telegraph, which allowed professional market hunters, as well as local amateurs, to converge on a site.

The most common way to kill passenger pigeons was to shoot them. Because the birds clustered so densely, no great skill was required to blast them from trees or out of the sky with a shotgun. Nets were widely used as well. Trappers broadcast grain and deployed captive “stool pigeons” to attract the birds, enabling them to snare hundreds at once. Captured pigeons could be killed by crushing their skulls between the thumb and forefinger, though, as Schorger notes, “It was difficult to continue this method without fatigue when many birds were handled.” Some hunters used specially designed pliers to break the birds’ necks. Others used their teeth, as Joel Greenberg recounts in *A Feathered River Across the Sky* (2014). Here’s how he describes Old Joe, a one-armed Civil War veteran who netted pigeons near Petoskey, Michigan, in 1878:

With one motion, he would grab a pigeon by the leg and toss it into his mouth head first, then chomp down on the skull: “What a sight! His face was smeared with blood from ear to ear; his beard dripped gore; and his clothes were covered with it.”

Dead pigeons were packed in ice, about 400 to a barrel, for shipment by rail to urban markets. A million and a half were sent south and east from the Petoskey nesting, which caused the price per barrel to fall below the cost of shipping them. For every bird that made it to the dinner table, many more were wasted. Vast numbers were left where they fell for the hogs to

clean up; others spoiled in transit. As many as 10 million pigeons may have died at the Petoskey nesting altogether.

Scientists now recognize that, in addition to island species, another type of animal is especially vulnerable to extinction: those with dense colonies that attract intensive human exploitation for the market.

Not everyone was oblivious to the risk of the passenger pigeon’s extinction. After witnessing the slaughter at a Kentucky roost in 1847, the French traveler Bénédict-Henry Révoil predicted that the passenger pigeon would “simply end by disappearing from this continent” within a century. As Greenberg remarks, Révoil turned out to be “overly optimistic by about fifty years.”

To most Americans, however, the passenger pigeon seemed ridiculously abundant, and the suggestion that it could disappear was preposterous. An 1857 Ohio State Senate committee report summed up the prevailing sentiment:

The passenger pigeon needs no protection. Wonderfully prolific, having the vast forests of the North as its breeding grounds, traveling hundreds of miles in search of food, it is here today, and elsewhere tomorrow, and no ordinary destruction can lessen them or be missed from the myriads that are yearly produced.

(The Ohio Historical Society ranked this as the fifth most embarrassing moment in the state’s history; the top spot went to the Cuyahoga River, in Cleveland, bursting into flames in 1969.)

When the passenger pigeon disappeared from North America’s skies, many could not believe it was really extinct and claimed that the birds had migrated to South America or Australia. Others accepted that the birds were gone but suggested that they had succumbed to some mysterious disease. Henry Ford thought they had drowned in the Pacific while attempting to fly to Asia.

In the end, it was the passenger pigeon’s very abundance that probably sealed its fate. Roosting and nesting in close proximity and in vast colonies, the species exhibited the ecological survival strategy known as “predator satiation”: their numbers were suffi-

cient to weather any losses to weasels, raccoons, hawks, and other predators. Since the pigeons moved frequently, predator populations in any one place could never grow to the point that they posed an existential threat.

But in the hunters of the nineteenth century, the passenger pigeon encountered a predator that could not be satiated. The last passenger pigeon killed in the wild is generally believed to have been shot by a boy in Pike County, Ohio, on March 24, 1900. The bird was stuffed by the wife of a retired sheriff (some say the sheriff shot it himself and invented the boy as a cover story) and was named Buttons for the black shoe buttons she used to cover the holes where the eyes had been. Today Buttons is displayed at the Ohio History Center, in Columbus. Greenberg uncovered evidence of a later specimen shot in Indiana in 1902 that was destroyed when rain breached the roof of the woodshed attic where it was stored.

The extinction sparked a range of emotions. Rewards were offered for the discovery of survivors. “No better example of eternal hope, so characteristic of man, can be found,” Schorger writes, “than the search for a living wild passenger pigeon long after it had ceased to exist.” Federal and state wildlife-protection laws were passed, too late for the passenger pigeon but in time to save animals such as the American bison, another once-plentiful species that had been pushed to the verge of extinction.

On a psychological level, people struggled with the knowledge that extinction could happen so quickly, and that we could be the cause. It suggested a profoundly disquieting thought: if an apparently successful species like the passenger pigeon could go extinct, couldn’t the same thing happen to us?

In 1947, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology erected a monument to the passenger pigeon in Wyalusing State Park, near the site of the great nesting of 1871, with this inscription: THIS SPECIES BECAME EXTINCT THROUGH THE AVARICE AND THOUGHTLESSNESS OF MAN. Like most epitaphs, it’s a teaser. It hints at what happened but leaves a lot unsaid. What was the relation between “avarice” and “thoughtlessness”—did

avarice overwhelm thought, or did thoughtlessness leave the door open to avarice? What thought or thoughts, exactly, were missing? And did the blame lie with “man” or with particular men?

A recurrent theme in the narratives of American environmentalism is that people are bad. Humans, in this telling, are sinners, a cancerous growth on the face of the planet. The traditional goal of the environmental movement has been to restore a baseline, a state of nature that existed before human defilement. But however well these people-versus-nature narratives served environmentalism over the past century, the time has come to dismantle them and erect a new intellectual scaffolding.

Just as the passenger pigeon’s demise helped to shape twentieth-century environmentalism, so might a new and unlikely effort to resurrect the species change environmental thought and practice in the coming century. In February 2012, an invitation-only meeting was hosted at Harvard Medical School by George Church, a pioneer of genetic sequencing and the leader of the synthetic-biology team at Harvard’s Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering. It was convened by Stewart Brand, who heads the Long Now Foundation in San Francisco, and his wife, Ryan Phelan, the founder and former CEO of a genetic-testing company called DNA Direct. The meeting’s purpose was to consider using recent advances in genetic engineering to bring back the passenger pigeon.

The idea originally came from Brand, who was the founding editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. In an email to Church and the Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson, he wrote, “The death of the last passenger pigeon in 1914 was an event that broke the public’s heart and persuaded everyone that extinction is the core of humanity’s relation with nature.” He asked Church, who had already raised the possibility of bringing back the woolly mammoth, whether it would be possible to recreate the passenger pigeon. Brand seemed motivated less by the passenger pigeon’s importance to the environment than by its importance to environmental ideology. “The environmental and conservation movements have mired themselves in a tragic view of life,” he explained. “The return of

the passenger pigeon could shake them out of it—and invite them to embrace prudent biotechnology as a Green tool instead of a menace in this century.”

According to *The New York Times Magazine*, Church wrote back within three hours with “a detailed plan to return ‘a flock of millions to billions’ of passenger pigeons to the planet.” The plan proposed extracting DNA fragments from museum specimens of passenger-pigeon remains and combining these with DNA from the bird’s closest living relative, the band-tailed pigeon. Germ cells with the new genome would be inserted into the eggs of band-tailed pigeons, and the resulting chicks should produce offspring that carry traits from both species. The progeny would then be crossed through several generations to breed a new species that, while not identical to the original, would come pretty close. Brand and Phelan founded an outfit called Revive and Restore, with Phelan as its executive director, to translate the concept into reality.

Not everyone is convinced that this is a great idea. David Blockstein, a passenger-pigeon expert and senior scientist at the National Council for Science and the Environment, who participated in the Harvard meeting, is among the skeptics. “Suppose you did create a pseudo-passenger pigeon. Then what?” he asks. “This was a bird that needed hundreds of thousands of other birds to survive. How do you get there?” Blockstein also worries that efforts to revive extinct species could divert scarce resources from efforts to save endangered species that still exist, and that our commitment to saving them could be undermined if we come to believe that extinction is something we can reverse whenever we want. (It’s also much cheaper to keep a species alive than it is to resurrect it.)

Others have been more receptive. In March 2013 the National Geographic Society hosted a TEDx conference on “de-extinction” at its Washington headquarters that was convened by Revive and Restore. It featured discussions about efforts to bring back the passenger pigeon, the woolly mammoth, the Tasmanian tiger, and other species. Two months later, *Audubon* magazine carried a short interview with Ben Novak, a researcher at Revive and Restore,

under the cheery headline *WELCOME BACK*. The public appears to like the idea of de-extinction, or at least to accept it as possible and hence probably inevitable, influenced perhaps by *Jurassic Park*. The *Times Magazine*, citing a Pew poll from 2010, noted that “belief in de-extinction trails belief in evolution by only 10 percentage points.”

Restoring the passenger pigeon, or a facsimile of it, could mark a turning point in the attitudes of environmentalists toward new biotechnologies, in part by challenging the people-are-bad narrative. But de-extinction perpetuates another dubious tenet of environmental ideology, one that coalesced a century ago: the idea that it’s always preferable to return to a bygone baseline. For better or worse, ecosystems change. A big question—the mammoth in the room—is what’s better and what’s worse. It’s not obvious that turning back the clock is necessarily a good idea when the clock has kept ticking.

In thinking about what we should and should not do to create better ecosystems, history suggests that a certain degree of humility is in order. In 1872, a Cincinnati businessman named Andrew Erkenbrecher founded the Society for the Acclimatization of Birds, with the aim of importing nonnative bird species from Europe to combat a local caterpillar infestation. (The next year he founded the Cincinnati Zoo, where Martha died.) Among the species Erkenbrecher introduced to Cincinnati was the common starling. Although his first introductions did not survive, subsequent starling releases successfully established the species that Edward O. Wilson has called “a plague across America.” The worldwide starling population today is estimated at 600 million, about one third of which are in the Western Hemisphere. If we bring back passenger pigeons in even greater numbers, it’s not evident that this will be counted as a blessing a century from now.

Rather than pursue the hope that we can reverse time and retrieve a happy ending, perhaps we need to learn to admit it when we make terrible mistakes, absorb their lessons, and move on.

In the summer of 2007, the National Audubon Society issued a report called “Common Birds in



Photographs by Keith Carter. In May, Carter traveled to the Galápagos Islands to document the ways that humans have affected the ecosystems of the archipelago. This page: Tree ferns, Santa Cruz Island (top) and sea lion, Isabela Island (bottom)



Decline.” Analyzing four decades of population data, it warned of an “alarming decline of many of our most common and beloved birds.”

The story received wide press coverage. “We somehow trusted that all the innocent little birds were here to stay,” an editorial in the *New York Times* lamented. “What they actually need to survive, it turns out, is a landscape that is less intensely human.”

Few reporters or commentators bothered to examine the raw data on which the Audubon report was based. Had they done so, they would have found that among 309 bird species for which statistically meaningful trends could be established, species that experienced large population increases outnumbered, by an impressive margin, those showing large decreases. They might also have noticed that some of the birds in greatest decline are species that live in meadows, pastures, and early successional forests, habitats that have dwindled over the past 150 years as forests, especially in the northeastern states, reclaimed abandoned farmland. It turns out that birds like bobwhites, meadowlarks, and field sparrows would benefit from having a landscape that is a little more intensely human.

When I visited Robert Askins, a Connecticut College ornithologist and the author of *Restoring North America's Birds* (2000), he recalled the condition of bird populations at the close of the nineteenth century. The picture he painted was bleak. “After the passenger pigeon, the market hunters didn’t go into some other line of work,” he said. “They just moved on to other species. Back in 1900 you would have seen few waterbirds around here. No egrets. No sandpipers. Any ducks that survived would have been so gun-shy that you wouldn’t know they were there.”

Much has changed since then, and from the standpoint of wild

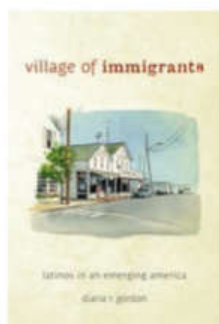
birds it's not all bad. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 banned the hunting and sale of most bird species. Thanks to the growth of the domesticated poultry industry, Americans eat more bird meat but a lot less wild fowl. In the middle of the century, when a new threat to birds emerged from DDT and similar pesticides, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* helped to inspire a ban on their use. Concerted and even heroic efforts were undertaken to restore populations of threatened species like the bald eagle and the wild turkey.

This does not mean that everything is hunky-dory. Climate change now threatens birds and all other living things. Birds may initially fare better than other species by virtue of their mobility. (In New England, where I live, southern species like the cardinal, the tufted titmouse, and the Carolina wren have become common residents.) But the ecosystems on which they rely for food cannot move as quickly. The environmental challenges we face today differ from those we faced a century ago. Our narratives must change, too. New technologies—notably, energy technologies—will be a necessary part of any solution. The quest to preserve or restore a baseline state of nature, always a mirage, is slowly being abandoned; ecologists have begun to think in terms of maintaining valuable processes rather than trying to freeze the biological landscape.

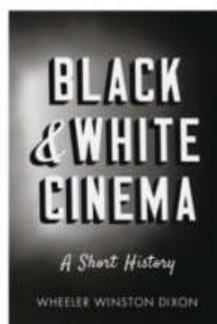
Humans are part of the web of life, and we can and sometimes do have positive impacts on the rest of nature. The old people-are-bad, nature-is-good formula, which was so central to the environmentalism that was born when Martha died, is too glib, and too often counterproductive. For when the choice before us is framed as humans versus nature, it turns out that most people, with however much regret, will choose humans. ■



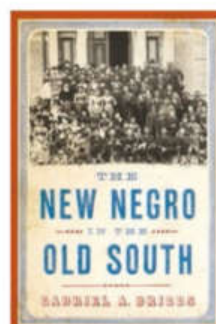
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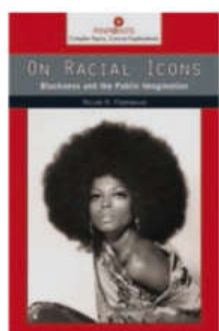
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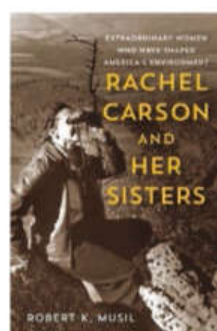
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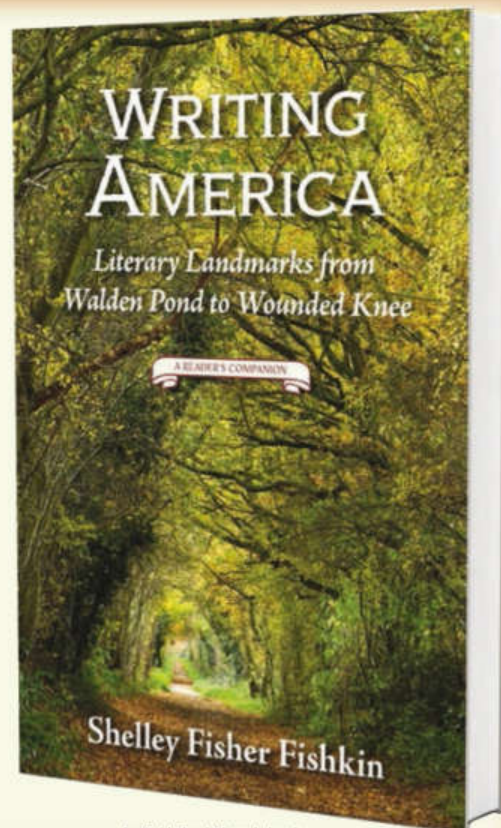
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NEW BOOKS

By Christine Smallwood



I just wanted to tap. But in the mid-Eighties and early Nineties, in the well-to-do suburbs of New Jersey, the price of flapping, winging, and shuffling off to Buffalo was the end-of-year recital, an orgy of hair spray, ruffles, armbands, and glitter that clocked in at more than four hours; I was onstage for four minutes. That's show business for you. I tapped as a milkmaid. I tapped in a miniskirted cowboy. I tapped in a bowler hat festooned with flowers. Most memorably, I tapped in a hot-pink spandex onesie with shredded capri legs and patches of gingham sewn across the chest and thigh. What were we supposed to be? Sharecroppers? Now that I've read Brian Seibert's 600-page

doorstop, **WHAT THE EYE HEARS: A HISTORY OF TAP DANCING** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$35, fsgbooks.com), that poor-farmer getup has come to seem eerie—the torn legs and patches like sartorial ghosts that could not be exorcised, only expressed in unknowing pastiche.

Tap was born in American slavery, the child of Irish jigging and West African polyrhythmic dance, and migrated from the plantation through minstrelsy, vaudeville, and Hollywood all the way to the NEA-funded festival circuit, the Gregory Hines vehicle *White Nights*, and Savion Glover's *Bring*

in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk. Seibert, a dance critic for the *New York Times*, documents every stage and hooper with passion, intelligence, and detail—perhaps too much detail. What makes tap special is that it's dance you hear, at once motion and percussion. (And unless it's live, beware what the ear sees. You may think those are the sounds of Gene Kelly tappin' in the rain, but he had three female assistants dub his footwork off camera.) Unlike the history of ballet, which consists of choreographed works that can be passed down from company to company, tap's history is a parade of star performers and signature

styles. Like jazz, tap is an art of what Seibert calls "stolen steps"—moves that were imitated and improved in jam sessions, back-alley dance-offs, and competitions at Harlem's Hoofers' Club, and memorized, surreptitiously, from balcony seats. It survived not in formal notation but in the bodies of each new generation. The relationship to jazz is more than analogical—tappers toured with Duke Ellington, traded solos with Miles Davis and Charlie Parker, and released records. (Ella Fitzgerald's debut at the Apollo was supposed to be a tap number, but, intimidated by the competition, she opted at the last minute to sing instead.)

A step was good if it was worth copying and making new—but who gets to do the copying has been hotly contested, and the reasons for the copying are not always easy to parse. Did the slaves who picked up European styles of jigging and clogging intend them only as parody? What was the balance of joy and hate? Though forced to dance for their masters' pleasure and at auction, they also danced "breakdowns" by choice, traveling hours on Saturday evenings and holidays to attend parties where the best took turns on planks suspended between barrels (an Irish tradition), or on wagon-bed bottoms, or simply pounding the clay floors. The "Negro" style of dancing was imitated by whites at "country frolics," and arrived on the minstrel stage around 1828, when Thomas Dartmouth Rice debuted the soon-to-be-infamous number "Jump Jim Crow." Rice, who claimed to have learned the song from a crippled slave, paired lyrics—"Wheel about, turn about/Do jus' so/An' ebery time I



Top: Will Gaines performing at the Wag Club, London, 1984 © David Corio/Redferns/Getty Images
Bottom: Duke Ellington playing piano, with Charles "Honi" Coles and Billy Strayhorn looking on, at the Stanley Theatre, Pittsburgh, c. 1942–1943 © Charles "Teenie" Harris/Carnegie Museum of Art/Getty Images

turn about/I jump Jim Crow”—with slaps of the foot, shuffles, and pigeon wings. These were moves not unlike those performed in the urban markets of the North, where buskers jiggled in exchange for money or eels. In urban ghettos, poor whites and blacks mixed in dance halls and saloons, where they challenged one another to contests that involved elements of jigs, hornpipes, and reels, testing who could “cut, shuffle, and attitudinize with the greatest facility,” as a local paper put it. From 1848 to 1850, Master Juba, the best black dancer from Manhattan’s Five Points, toured England and Scotland with a minstrel troupe called Pell’s Ethiopian Serenaders, sending a press accustomed to whites in blackface into paroxysms of confusion.

The term “tap” came into wide use in the Twenties, around the time that metal plates began to be produced for the mass market; performers, though, had long fixed nails to their soles for sound. As tap came to be featured in Broadway revues, local vaudeville shows, and club acts, different styles developed: white “eccentrics” did comedy routines; “flash” dance groups specialized in flips, splits, and acrobatic stunts; and well-heeled “class acts” stepped in sweet synchronicity. White performers surrounded themselves with “picks”: young black boys who tapped and smiled. Chorus girls high-kicked in time, although women in tap never received the same opportunities or recognition as men. Gifted groups like the Nicholas Brothers made it to Hollywood and into movies produced for black audiences. But with the exception of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, who starred alongside Shirley Temple, black performers were dropped into white films, not integrated into the plot.

Robinson was the only black tapper of his day to become a real star. He was celebrated for his subtlety—he would tap up and down a portable staircase (and pull a gun on anyone he saw doing the same) with effortless grace and control—and denounced as a pandering showman, an Uncle Tom. There’s an avant-garde tradition in tap, too: Paul Draper tapped to Bach on Broadway; Baby Laurence and Groundhog danced for dope on the sidewalk outside Minton’s Playhouse, a bebop haven in Harlem.

After pervading every aspect of American entertainment in the Thirties and Forties, tap fell into a decades-long hibernation. It was brought out of the underground in the Seventies and Eighties by white women—including Brenda Bufalino, Jane Goldberg, and Camden Richmond—who exhumed, learned from, and looked after old-timers like Eddie Brown and Honi Coles. (One of Bufalino’s students coined the moniker “Supermoms of Tap” to describe the dynamic.) The careers of Cholly Atkins, Steve Condos, and Bunny Briggs also benefited from the revival. These men enjoyed being back in the spotlight, and did whatever they damn well pleased: they would solo for fifteen minutes or forty-five, improvise or sit one out. “When you get old,” Buster Brown said, “you can get away with anything.”

One reason tap declined in the Fifties was the rise of the Broadway musical, which dovetailed with a new kind of realistic theater dance, in which every gesture was rooted in the personality of the character. No choreographer was more important to this evolution than Agnes de Mille, but that’s something you’d never know from her finely written memoir, *DANCE TO THE PIPER* (New York Review Books, \$17.95, nyrb.com), which was originally published in 1951. It’s a dry and self-deprecating bildungsroman that was, by her account, scratched out on napkins and envelopes while she was “doing a barre” or tending to an infant.



The story begins when de Mille is a child. Her father, a playwright, moves the family from Manhattan to Hollywood, where his brother, Cecil, was breaking into the moving-picture business. She sees Anna Pavlova perform and falls in love with ballet, but is not permitted to attend lessons more than twice a week. Dance was no career for a proper lady; haphazard training, however, is no way to learn a craft. De Mille falls behind as soon as she begins, and eventually pushes her dreams aside to attend UCLA, where she studies English and choreographs a few numbers for campus rallies.

The day after she graduates, her parents announce that they are divorcing. De Mille moves back to New York with her mother, the most vivid character in *Dance to the Piper*—controlling, suffocating, discouraging, and endlessly self-sacrificing. The daughter of Henry George, a Progressive Era economist, she sews Agnes’s costumes, sells tickets to her performances, and converts the dancers she meets to her father’s Single Tax plan. De Mille’s luck turns when she finally moves out of her mother’s apartment.

The reigning ideal of the woman artist had been set down by Isadora Duncan, who, de Mille writes, “broke all the traditional moralities and lived like a bacchante.” De Mille’s body, temperament, and upbringing all pointed another way:

I had been brought up to believe you must love the man you kissed, pay your bills, keep your word, be as modest as possible and work faithfully. If inspiration hit you along the way, so much the better, but it was not to be counted on.... I would very much have liked to be heroic but it struck me that if I went against my instincts I would really be whoring.

Bigger than the typical ballerina, and more of a comedienne than she cared to be, de Mille presented her choreography of everyday stories about boys and girls as an invention of necessity. Its expressive, theatrical qualities were also influenced by her early exposure to Uncle Cecil’s movie spectacles. Though she would eventually become one of the most famous choreographers in America—she earned more than a million dollars, adjusted for inflation, in

1950 alone—in earlier years it was hard to persuade anyone to take a gamble on her. She struggled desperately to impress agents, managers, and company directors. She was defrauded by shady bookers and nearly bankrupted her mother. She could not be choosy about where she rehearsed, at one point sinking so low as to share space with—tap dancers.

The school I had chosen to practice at was depressing. The hours alternated with tap-dancing and the rooms resounded to the clatter of steel-bottomed shoes, while the dressing rooms were given over to tiny children getting themselves into satin pants and diamond-studded brassieres under the admonishings of their hard-eyed mothers.

Satin pants, diamond-studded brassieres—the history of the dance costume, and the trauma it has wreaked on our collective consciousness, surely deserve their own book. (I would be happy to contribute my own photographs to the cause.)

De Mille never treats success as her due. (“My brief and frenzied flurries with commercial troupes of mixed prostitutes and chorus dancers had not helped me build a technique of composing and rehearsing nor raised my confidence to speak of” is one typical remark.) And when she does achieve something, she generously credits everyone she has ever met for making it possible, as women will do. De Mille ultimately choreographed fifteen musicals—including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *Brigadoon*—and twenty-one ballets, of which three—*Rodeo*, *Three Virgins and a Devil*, and *Fall River Legend*—are still in repertory. But *Dance to the Piper* ends, disappointingly, with her riding off into the sunset as she marries a man, Walter Prude, whose portrait in her memoir is painted far less brilliantly than those of Martha Graham and the members of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

In 2008, two years before she died at the age of ninety-eight, the artist Louise Bourgeois sat for a number of portraits with her friend the photographer Alex Van Gelder. The result, **MUMBLING BEAUTY LOUISE BOURGEOIS** (Thames & Hudson, \$50,

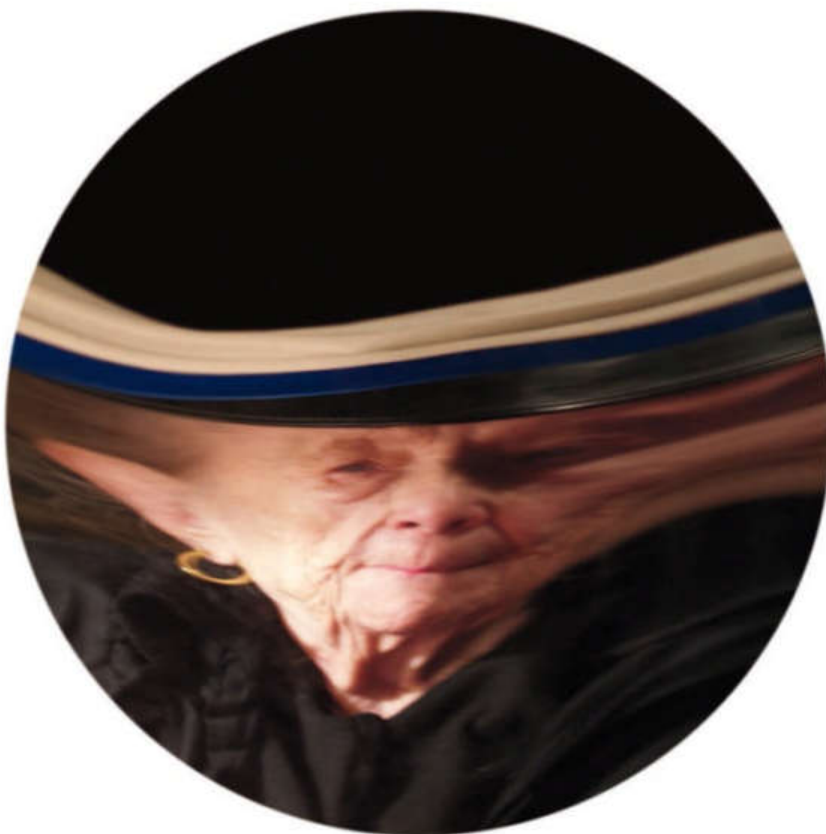
thamesandhudsonusa.com), is alternately monstrous and endearing. She gamely dons a mask, holds a knife, paints, peers through a magnifying glass, reclines in bed, and is reflected in a funhouse mirror that pulls her like putty, stretching beyond repair her already gnomonic features. A pigeon alights on her head. Her black orthopedic shoes swing off the ground. Her mouth gapes, the sharp yellow teeth—one is missing—like the open gates of hell.

Van Gelder photographed Bourgeois for a 2011 exhibition called *Armed Forces*, in which her gnarled

Mumbling Beauty that Bourgeois was “a consummate performer in front of the camera,” and I have no reason to doubt that she found the distortions and disturbances of the camera to be good and mischievous fun.

In *Dance to the Piper*, de Mille describes the paradox of the ballerina’s body, which “has been disciplined to look unlike a human body” but “must remain a body and can never be anything else”:

It therefore represents the body as we wish it were, not one of our bodies well-used, but a dream body liberated from



hands float against a black backdrop like severed abstractions. His sensibility finds aesthetic satisfaction where others might find grotesquerie; last year in London he exhibited a series called *Meat Portraits*, photographs of found and arranged animal entrails and raw meat from a slaughterhouse in Benin. Those drooping and distended sacs and organs bear a nontrivial visual relation to Bourgeois’s own tumescent and tumorous sculptures, which would not be out of place in a horror movie. He writes in

trouble. It is the epitome of all the elements we consider most attractive—lightness, fleetness, strength, ease and, above all, fulfillment.

Few of us will ever know what it is like to inhabit a dream body liberated from trouble. But all of us who receive the mixed blessing of long life will know the trouble of Bourgeois’s nightmare body, a body well used: bones bent with age, skin loose with wear, limbs too stiff or weak to shuffle, let alone dance. ■

NEW MOVIES

By Nat Segnit

Early on in the movie adaptation of Uzodinma Iweala's 2005 novel, **BEASTS OF NO NATION**, Agu, the preteen protagonist, and his unnamed older brother have just pulled off an impish scam—demanding money from a passing driver to remove a tree branch they themselves had hacked

The tidiness of this narrative arrangement is typical of the film, and instructive as to the distortions inherent in the adaptation process. In Iweala's novel, his father's execution happens not because he is betrayed by an incidental character but because senseless, indiscriminate killing is the air the novel breathes. It's

ri suit—results in a desperate shortage of supplies. In the book, one of Agu's fellow insurgents simply gets fed up one day and guns Commandant down. "Commandant is dead," observes book-Agu, flatly. "It was so easy to be killing him."

Where the movie, then, is conventionally dramatic, the novel derives its affect precisely, and paradoxically, from the affectlessness of Agu's narration and the breakdown of meaningful causation it both enacts and describes. The universe of the movie is still moral; actions have consequences. In the novel, as



down to block the road—when they are accosted by a wild-haired old lady. Agu's father, a local schoolteacher, has set aside some of his family's land to shelter refugees displaced by the escalating civil war in this unnamed West African country—land the furious "witch woman" maintains is hers. "I know your whole family!" she raves. "The devil will bless you one by one!" Later, when troops from the ruling National Reformation Council arrive and line up nonpartisan townsfolk, including Agu and his family, the old woman makes good on her curse by claiming not to recognize them. "They are not from here," she tells the soldiers. "They must be rebels." Agu escapes, but his father and brother are summarily executed as spies.

debatable, of course, whether the restless momentum of film demands the strict causative logic of A-leads-to-B, or whether this is merely an orthodoxy that has hardened into a rule, but in *Beasts of No Nation* the adherence to the creed of character motivation (by Cary Joji Fukunaga, directing his own adapted screenplay) has damaging consequences for the film's persuasive power. Toward the end of the film (readers may take this spoiler alert as due notice of all the spoilers to follow), after Agu has been pressed into child soldiery, the leader of the rebel unit, who is known only as Commandant and is played by Idris Elba, is abandoned by his battalion when a rift with the Supreme Commander—Jude Akuwudike, Bond-villainous in his crisp diction and white short-sleeved safa-

Agu gets high on "gun juice," a presumably amphetamine stimulant "tasting like bullet and sugarcane," and learns to kill without compunction, past and future give way to a perpetual depthless present of numbed barbarity. We are moved because Agu isn't. The novel's argot, whose rhythms and syntax are reportedly imitative of several Nigerian languages, underwrites this sense of blank, ceaseless futility by subsuming events into a pidgin present continuous. "All the time bullet is just eating everything, leaf, tree, ground, person—eating them—just making person to bleed everywhere." "I am wanting to kill; I don't know why. I am just wanting to kill."

The idiom is preserved in the adaptation, both in dialogue and in

Agu's voice-over, but to less purpose. The language resists affect while the movie perseveres in imposing it. One unexpected corollary of Fukunaga's insistence on cause and effect, on an audit trail of explicability, is his squeamishness with regard to atrocity. From one perspective, this is defensible, since film is a literalist medium whose depictions of extreme violence can't avoid being more explicit than they appear on the page. When a small girl is torn from her mother and stomped to death, or Agu is sexually abused by Commandant, it's both ethically and aesthetically justified that the camera, no less than the audience, should want to look away. But in another respect, the movie's representations of violence are unduly cautious. In the book, when Agu and his mute friend, Strika, discover the mother and child hiding under a bed, the wrenching horror of what follows derives not only from the acts described but from Agu's dissociated description of them: "I am standing outside myself and I am watching it all happening." On-screen, by contrast, Agu cuts short the mother's rape by shooting her in the head—horrific, for sure, but also an act of mercy. Here, too, the urge to explanation and motivation places Agu's actions in a coherent moral context, and thereby squanders the opportunity to show these horrors for what they are, however much we might sympathize with Agu's own brutalization: irredeemable.

Agu's first kill is another case in point. In *Sin Nombre* (2009), Fukunaga's feature-film debut, a boy of roughly Agu's age is initiated into the Mexican branch of the Mara Salvatrucha after being coerced into shooting a member of a rival gang. Almost exactly the same thing happens in *Beasts of No Nation*, in which Fukunaga decorously cuts away from the gruesome image of an enemy soldier's skull being split first by Agu's machete, then by Strika's, to a muffled slow-motion shot from somewhere near the dead man's (impossible) point of view, as the boys hack him to pieces and the camera lens is spattered with blood. At the start of the

movie, before war has reached the village, Agu and his friends are seen trying to peddle the eviscerated cabinet of an old TV set to the Nigerian peacekeepers who patrol the buffer zone. "It is imagination TV," goes Agu's sales pitch, as his best pal pokes his head through the frame to demonstrate its 3-D capabilities. It's a charming sequence, feistily played by the kids, and eloquent—if a little unsubtly so—about the unreality of war to children (and moviegoers) whose experience of it is (so far) limited to mediated images. In the machete scene, the blood-spattered lens recalls that earlier, more innocent state, and conforms to the derealization that Agu experiences in the corresponding passage in the book:

Strika is joining me and we are just beating [the enemy] and cutting him while everybody is laughing. It is like the world is moving so slowly and I am seeing each drop of blood and each drop of sweat flying here and there.

Except that in the movie it's the viewer, not Agu, who is estranged from the reality of the soldier's murder. The spatters of blood draw more attention to the lens than they do to themselves. Time and again the medium militates against our immersion in it.

The result is a film that is at once diligently dramatic and oddly becalmed, a film about unutterable horror that isn't particularly horrifying. As Commandant, Elba is slow-moving, bearish, a pinch or two less trim than he was as Stringer Bell, given to rousing speeches and the languid hand gestures of a hip-hop M.C. in wearily humid conditions. If his swagger has an actorly, self-regarding quality—a slow roll to his gait, a delectation in each long pull on his cigarette—that is apt enough in a character whose authority is grounded in little more than self-assertion. Kept waiting for hours, then effectively demoted by the rebels' Supreme Commander, Commandant abruptly becomes yesterday's man, and in his mortification Elba brilliantly succeeds at exposing, if only for a moment, the frightened little boy inside a man who has denied so many their childhood. Still, I

wonder if Elba doesn't bring something a little too conventionally charismatic to the role, particularly by comparison with Abraham Attah's Agu. As happens so often with child actors, Attah, a fifteen-year-old Ghanaian with no movie experience, doesn't so much act the part as disregard the distinction between acting and being himself. His transformation matches Agu's, as both boys, real and fictional, become the child soldier with equal unself-consciousness: speechless with fear in his first interrogation by Commandant, grimly comic marching through the bush in his outsized helmet, a child again playing blind-man's buff with Strika during a rare and joyous respite from active deployment. It's in Attah that the movie comes closest to the novel's disquieting, engrossing directness.

Fukunaga's last film was an accomplished, subdued adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (2011). Whereas in that film, working off Moira Buffini's quietly ingenious screenplay, Fukunaga was content to point the camera and let it follow the cerebral cut and thrust of his protagonists' courtship, *Beasts of No Nation* betrays the weakness for portent so amply demonstrated by the first season of *True Detective* (HBO), which Fukunaga directed. Notwithstanding Woody Harrelson's appeal, the show suffered from a thin plot padded out with the insufferably pretentious hogwash spouted by the Matthew McConaughey character, and resolved on a perp whose sickening voodoo-flavored degeneracy seemed, on the basis of his lair, to go hand in hand with haute couture set-design skills. Nothing so preposterous afflicts *Beasts*, but there are traces of this dramatic overdeterminism in the percussive cuts to black when Agu is captured by the rebels, and in what we might call Fukunaga's trademark oh-my-God-now-we-realize-the-extent-of-this crane shot, as Dan Romer's score throbs discordantly and the camera rises diplodocuslike to take in the rebel encampment.

Again, it's tempting to lay this tendency to overemphasis at the adaptation's door. To discard the

novel's flashback structure in favor of simple linearity is to expose Agu's story, for all its incident, as a succession of inevitabilities, impassively told. One might therefore conceive of Fukunaga's interventions as understandable efforts to compensate for a basic dramatic deficit in Iweala's story. But the effect is no less distancing than his urge to contextualize its atrocities, and the reminders of the movie's artifice come at the expense of its ability to move us. In the novel, Agu recalls a village initiation ceremony in which an ox is killed and the local boys, wearing leopard and ox masks, rub its blood on their bodies. Then the masks are removed and "all the boy is becoming men." Unable as the movie is to recount Agu's prehistory, it transfers initiatory responsibilities to the rebel battalion; in one sequence that comes complete with herbal benedictions, spaced-out chanting, and cod-occult skull-arches in the *True Detective* vein, Agu and his fellow recruits are ceremonially "executed" by firing squad in order to be reborn as soldiers. All very well, but if it's authentic, I'm a witch doctor. What's more, Agu's hazing by the rebels in the movie literalizes a process that Iweala leaves to unfold by implication—Agu's coming of age. As ever, Fukunaga yields to the impulse to intrude and editorialize.

The same might be said of the film's cinematography, which goes crazy-colored when the drugs kick in and the rebels mount a frenzied attack on an enemy stronghold. Many of these images are striking, even beautiful, but it's hard not to feel that they emerge more from the desire for a pretty shot than from the truth of the material. In any case, they pale in comparison to the martian poetry of book-Agu's fresh view of the world:

We are at the camp and I am watching how the sun is just dropping down behind the hill like it is not wanting to be seeing us anymore. All the color is leaking out of it and looking like flame from hell all over, eating up the top of all the tree, making all the leaf bright, bright. Suddenly it is night. ■

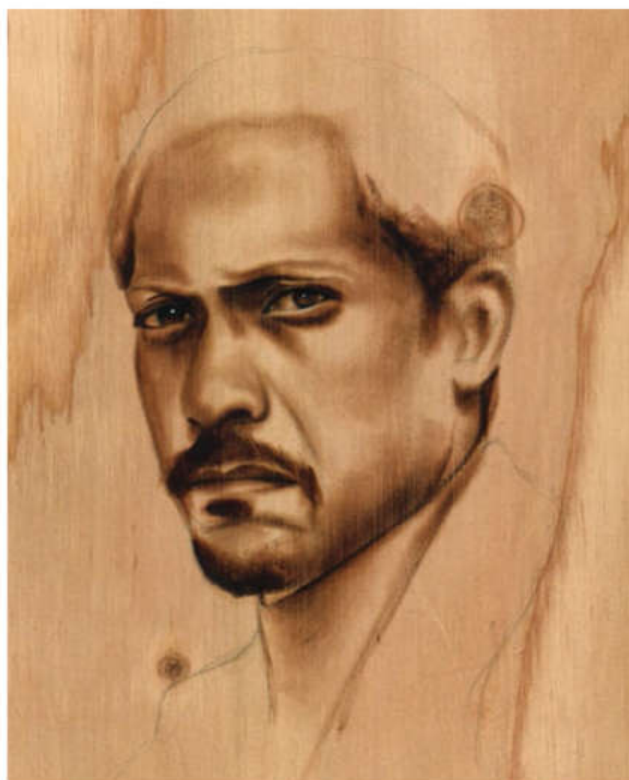
LUCID DREAMING

Two ways of looking at Percival Everett

By Justin Taylor

Discussed in this essay:

Half an Inch of Water, by Percival Everett. Graywolf Press. 176 pages. \$16. graywolfpress.org.



Over the course of thirty or so years, Percival Everett has written thirty or so books, most of them novels. A restless polymath with a knack for deconstructing genres, he has quietly built up one of the most eclectic and original bodies of work in American letters. There are quasi noirs, antiwesterns, retellings of Greek myths, and academic farces—plus four story collections, a few volumes of poetry, and a children's book.

Mainstream literary fame has eluded Everett, or perhaps he's the one doing

Justin Taylor is the author of three books of fiction, including Flings, now available in paperback from Harper Perennial.

the eluding. He rarely does publicity, doesn't write reviews, and doesn't read reviews of his own work; he is probably not coming soon to a bookstore near you. His novels tend to be both choppy and dense, with chapters broken up into one- or two-page scenes that are riven with philosophical asides, interpolations from outside texts, wordplay, classical allusions, self-interrogations, metafictional interjections, and the occasional photograph, drawing, mathematical

equation, or semiotic square. A critic who felt like tossing out points of reference would be tempted to mention Laurence Sterne, E. E. Cummings, Jean Toomer, T. S. Eliot, the Jameses Joyce and Baldwin, and Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. All of Everett's work is, to a greater or lesser degree, satirical; much of it throbs with rage.

Erasure, first published in 2001 by the University Press of New England and reissued in 2011 by Graywolf Press, is a toxic polyphony. Everett eviscerates academia and publishing, two worlds in which it can be difficult to distinguish a circular firing squad from a circle jerk. Special contempt is reserved for the way African-American writers are

quarantined by a popular audience that is mainly interested in shoring up liberal pieties and reinforcing racist clichés. (Asked by *Bomb* magazine whether *Erasure* is a protest novel, Everett responded: “*Erasure* is like describing a rattlesnake’s bite. Am I protesting rattlesnakes?”) The narrator is Thelonious “Monk” Ellison, a writer of experimental fiction (hateful phrase) adrift in the horse latitudes of his career, whose bibliography is suspiciously similar to Percival Everett’s. Monk’s latest novel has just been rejected for the seventeenth time.

“The line is, you’re not black enough,” my agent said.

“What’s that mean, Yul? How do they even know I’m black? Why does it matter?”

“We’ve been over this before. They know because of the photo on your first book. They know because they’ve seen you. They know because you’re black, for crying out loud.”

“What, do I have to have my characters comb their afros and be called niggers for these people?”

“It wouldn’t hurt.”

Outraged by the success of a book called *We’s Lives In Da Ghetto* (probably a stand-in for Sapphire’s *Push*), Monk sets out to write the most cynical, exploitative, and irredeemable piece of ghetto-poverty porn that he can manage. The resulting work, which Everett includes in its entirety, is a novella called *My Pafology*. Monk asks Yul to submit it to publishers under the pseudonym Stagg R. Leigh. The book gets a six-figure advance and becomes a bestseller. White readers and critics fall all over themselves to praise the “realism” of Leigh’s lurid and ludicrous tale.

Things come to a head when Monk finds himself on a committee that is poised to award a major literary prize to Leigh. If Monk allows the prize to go to *My Pafology* then he will do more than commit fraud: he will bestow the laurels of art on something that is not art, and the stamp of legitimacy on something that has none. Worse, he will endorse the racist fantasy of blackness that he was attempting to ridicule.

Everett explores similar themes from the reverse angle—and with

significantly more concision—in a short story called “The Appropriation of Cultures,” from his 2004 collection, *Damned if I Do*. In the story, Daniel Barkley, a black musician living in South Carolina, is asked to play “Dixie” so often that he comes to enjoy the song—first perversely, then in something like earnest. He buys a used truck with a giant Confederate-flag decal.

Confederate sentimentality is the result of a profoundly blinkered sense of history, or else dog-whistle politics—a Venn diagram that’s often expressed as a circle. Barkley subverts the claim that the flag symbolizes “heritage not hate” precisely by taking it seriously: he encourages other black people to fly the flag, and performs “Dixie,” of his own volition, at the banquet of a black medical association.

Soon, there were several, then many cars and trucks in Columbia, South Carolina, sporting Confederate flags and being driven by black people. Black businessmen and ministers wore rebel-flag buttons on their lapels and clips on their ties.... Black people all over the state flew the Confederate flag. The symbol began to disappear from the fronts of big rigs and the back windows of jacked-up four-wheelers. And after the emblem was used to dress the yards and mark picnic sites of black family reunions the following Fourth of July, the piece of cloth was quietly dismissed from its station with the U.S. and State flags atop the State Capitol. There was no ceremony, no notice. One day, it was not there.

(Following the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in June, Graywolf posted the full text of “The Appropriation of Cultures” on its website.)

Crises of identity, language, and meaning are standard-issue for Everett’s protagonists. In *The Water Cure*, for example, the narrator is Ishmael Kidder, an embittered romance novelist who publishes under a female pseudonym. After Kidder’s eleven-year-old daughter is raped and murdered, he tracks down and kidnaps the man he believes is responsible for her death. He keeps this man (whom he sometimes calls W and sometimes

calls Art) hidden in his basement, lashed to a plank of wood and surrounded by mirrors, so the man can see nothing but his own face. Emboldened by the depravities of the Bush Administration—whose members he loathes to a man, even as he follows their example—Kidder waterboards Art whenever he can get away from his agent, Sally, who has surprised him for a weekend visit, hoping for a look at his next bodice-ripper, *The Gentle Storm*.

And so my novels of romance, though they are hardly romantic, of untamed unbridled unmanageable lust and fervid, even indelicate, animal attraction (as if there were another kind) were what they were, no more, no less, pretending nothing and offering no apology, and as I wrote them, write them, to change tense in midstream or flow or river or current, I wonder ... why can’t I pause in the sky, the god that I am, during some steamy removal of some hat or cape or bra and simply tell the lost and lonely woman who is reading [my novel] ... that she should be attending to the fact that her beloved country is torturing people and breaking its own highly held laws and substituting capitalism for democracy as a system of government and raping the world, and how can I do this without seeming like a raving political pundit paid by political tools to promote some political position instead of simply being a man who is ashamed of his country and trying to offer a moral truth and do so without sounding naïve, which I no doubt am, but does that make me wrong? And it’s all rather silly, isn’t it? Because cynical as we are, jaded as we are, I sound naïve. Regardless of all truth, I am quite naïve to write this. But I am happily (and oh read this word ironically if you do nothing else) naïve.

Everett was born in 1956 and, like Barkley, grew up in Columbia, South Carolina. His father, also named Percival Everett, was a dentist, and his mother, Dorothy, worked in his father’s office. He majored in philosophy at the University of Miami and continued on to graduate school at the University of Oregon, where he studied Wittgenstein before leaving for

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Brown's writing program. His first book, *Suder*, a comic novel about a black third baseman for the Seattle Mariners trying to jolt himself out of a brutal slump, was published by Viking in 1983. His next five books were on nearly as many small presses. In 1994, however, Faber and Faber published *God's Country*, the first of Everett's antiwesterns. Soon after, his editor at Faber, Fiona McCrae, left to become publisher of Graywolf, and he went with her. Graywolf has been his primary publisher ever since.

Everett has spent most of the past three decades in the West and the Southwest, where much of his work is set, and which he depicts with a familiarity and care equal to that of, say, Annie Proulx or Cormac McCarthy. He teaches creative writing and critical theory at the University of Southern California, and is married to the novelist Danzy Senna, with whom he has two children. Everett's hobbies include painting, playing music, and training mules. An atypically personal biographical note on the Graywolf website mentions that he has fly-fished the West for more than thirty years.

His work has been widely reviewed, and if critical opinion has often been divided, well, the books themselves seem deliberately divisive. Alice Hoffman, reviewing *Suder* in *The New York Times Book Review*, wrote approvingly that Everett "knows the terrors of childhood, and his warm humor can be charming," but argued that the book "does not always succeed ... because the author is trying to do too much." Outsized ambition has proven the most consistent and enduring assessment of Everett's work, though some critics have felt this was grounds for praise rather than complaint. In 1999, David Galef celebrated *Glyph's* "glorious excess" in its "sendups of everything from semiotics to military intelligence, deconstruction and cognitive psychology." Roger Boylan, in a rave for the psych-out mystery novel *Assumption* (2011), wrote that

Everett casts his line, as it were, pretty far, and some of the things he reels

in, along with a few red herrings, are weighty indeed: racism, anomie, disillusionment, the meaning (or lack thereof) of one man's life—the American nightmare, in brief, at the end of the line. The settings, the protagonist and the eccentric and pathetic cast of characters will haunt you long after you close the book. I haven't read anything like it since Georges Simenon.

Alan Cheuse, in a review for NPR of the existential and narrative ouroboros *Percival Everett* by Virgil Russell (2013), called Everett "one of the most gifted and versatile of contemporary writers," before going on to pan the book itself. ("It's never good for art when critical jargon takes precedence over narrative sense." "TELL THE [Expletive] STORY!" Lack of expletive in the original.)

Everett won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and the Believer Book Award in 2010 for *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*, which features a narrator named Not Sidney Poitier, a wealthy orphan who lives with Ted Turner (don't ask) and is educated mostly by a revolutionary-socialist tutor. Not Sidney drops out of high school and buys his way into Morehouse College, where he takes a class called "Philosophy of Nonsense" that is administered by a sad-sack academic fraud named Percival Everett. Not Sidney's ultimate goal is to make a pilgrimage to Los Angeles to visit his mother's grave, but as soon as he gets outside of Atlanta he's arrested for driving while black. Drew Toal, in *The Rumpus*, called it "the funniest book I read all year, if not ever." *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* earned Everett a third award in 2010: the Dos Passos Prize, which is usually given to writers who, like Dos Passos, have been unjustly ignored.

I*Am Not Sidney Poitier* is Everett at his most accessible, and its reception was among the strongest of his career, but it hardly signaled a definitive popular turn. In short order he followed it up with *Percival Everett* by Virgil Russell, which—contra Cheuse—is a disjunctive masterpiece. Inconclusive, self-consuming, defiant

of summary, and terribly, terribly sad, the novel is as self-aware as its title would suggest. Yet it has neither the exhaustive self-portraiture of Karl Ove Knausgaard nor the autobiographical coyness of Ben Lerner and Sheila Heti.

Percival Everett by Virgil Russell takes as its focal point the relationship between an ailing, mostly senile father and his adult son. It is a study in what it means to communicate (or fail to communicate) with someone whose identity is so bound up with your own that talking to him can be a way of talking to yourself. The novel is dedicated to Percival Everett père, who died in 2010, and who, one comes to suspect, is the Percival Everett of the title. This suggests that Virgil Russell—whose name combines Dante’s spirit-guide through hell with the analytic philosopher best remembered for *Why I Am Not a Christian*—is the stand-in for Ever-

ett fils. (This reading relies on the perhaps erroneous assumption that the father and son, who are never named in the text, are the Everett and Russell of the title.)

When the son visits the father, they relive memories and tell jokes, wrestling for control of the narrative and talking over each other, the way family will. Dreams, shaggy-dog stories, and plot threads multiply. Narrative does not so much progress as accrue. I thought of Ben Marcus’s introduction to *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, in which he recalls “other, better meanings of plot, such as: small piece of ground. In this sense, plot would refer to setting, the space in which a story occurs.” Plots are also, of course, apportionments of space in a cemetery. All of which feels appropriate for a book about the tenuous but persistent call of blood to blood, and the tedious obscenity of dying.

My father was depressed, it took no genius to see that, sitting there all day long in that room in what they call an assisted living facility, pressing his button and waiting for the orderly to come. . . . I was depressed too, seeing him that way, then leaving to live my own life far away, knowing his condition, knowing his sadness, knowing his boredom, and depressed because I could for days on end live my life without feeling the horror of his daily existence.

It’s a rare novel that can joke about playing “pin the tail on the narrator” and still end up bringing you to tears.

Everett’s latest book, *Half an Inch of Water*, marks another departure (his detractors might say a respite) from the highly kinetic absurdist mode of his novels. It is his first collection of short stories in a decade, and although the form does not always play to his

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strengths, it does save him from his worst excesses. His even temper here is in such sharp distinction to the willful scrambles of his longer fiction that if it weren't for all the fly-fishing and horse training, you might not guess the stories and the novels were written by the same guy. (Here's the *Times Book Review* again, reviewing his 1996 collection, *Big Picture*: "Mr. Everett uses a laconic style that sometimes seems to work against his characters' eccentricities, but at others it feels perfectly apt, giving them a strangely appealing complexity." To which this critic can only add: Yup.) The nine stories in *Half an Inch of Water* feel almost like haiku in their openness, and in their attention to the natural world. They are set in the nowhere towns, Indian reservations, and wild places of Wyoming—places from which Laramie looks like the city and Denver seems a veritable metropolis.

The first story, "Little Faith," introduces us to Sam Innis, a veterinarian and tracker who will have a cameo in another story. Sam lives with his wife, Sophie, on the ranch where he grew up: "Love of the spread had been rubbed into him like so much salve, a barrier against whatever was out there in the world, a layer of peace." The story is divided in two. In the first part, Sam and Sophie attend the funeral of Dave Wednesday, a ninety-two-year-old Native American man who was the oldest male resident of the nearby reservation by a significant margin. The funeral finds Sam ill at ease, as much on account of having to sit in a church as for the sad business conducted there. Soon after he and his wife get home, there's a small earthquake, which does negligible damage to the property but deepens Sam's disquiet. Still, he keeps his appointments for that afternoon, the first of which brings him to a nearby ranch to meet a man named Wes, who wants to know whether his mare is ready for breeding.

You know, you're okay, Wes said.

Sam looked at him. How's that?

You know, being a black vet out here. I have to admit, I had my doubts.

About what exactly?

Whether you'd make it.

You mean fit in?

I guess that's what I mean, yeah.

Wes, I grew up here. Grade school. High school. I've never fit in. I probably will never fit in. I accept that.

Wes's face was now blank. He didn't understand. He was just a degree away from cocking his head like a confused hound.

Sam said, Thanks, Wes. I'm glad you think I'm okay.

That's all I was saying.

I know, Wes.

In the second part of the story, Penny, a deaf Native American child, has run off into the hills, apparently frightened by the earthquake. She's been missing for six hours, without food or water, and night is approaching. Sam lights out on a borrowed horse into "a hundred square miles of barren, desolate, arid hills, full of worthless ore and seasonal creeks that could flood in a blink." He eventually finds Penny on a flat expanse of rock, surrounded by rattlesnakes that are taking in the last warmth of the setting sun. He retrieves her but in the process is bitten twice. He has a snakebite kit but knows it won't be enough. "If only he'd been bitten only once, he'd probably be okay because of his size. But two bites, that was a different matter." Too sick to bring Penny back, he builds a fire from creosote and sagebrush, and imagines that "the burning sage might cleanse him." He fans it over himself "as he'd seen Old Dave do on many occasions." Soon enough, Sam either passes out or drifts into a vision.

There was Dave Wednesday, younger than he had ever been while Sam knew him, sitting in front of a fireplace in a cabin.

You're thinking you're having a vision, aren't you? Dave said.

Pretty much....

Snakebit?

Afraid so.

Dave offered Sam a mug of coffee. It's real strong, will keep you awake for days and days. You're not a spiritual person.

That's an understatement.

Yet here you are, hallucinating stereotypes.

Pretty much. Sam drank some coffee. It was actually rather weak, though it was too hot even to sip. So, how do I handle these bites?

You're the doctor.
I forgot.

When Sam wakes up, "the fire had not died down at all"—an indication that little time has passed. And yet he no longer suffers nausea or chills, and the swelling around the bites is all but gone. Sam and Penny spot a shooting star in the sky, smother the fire, and start walking again; soon enough they are found by a rescue party. An incredulous paramedic concludes that Sam must have received two dry bites. "I'd play the lottery tonight, if I were you," he advises.

From its title to its conclusion, "Little Faith" is structured as a conversion narrative, but it seems unlikely that Sam will emerge from the day much changed. After Penny is reunited with her family, he hugs her farewell and heads off on his own, waving away the paramedic and the others. His horse has cracked a hoof and will need to be walked carefully back to the road, which Sam insists on doing by himself. Still, some effect of the campfire experience lingers: "He was so confused. He didn't know why he was not light-headed and nauseated and sweaty. Feeling healthy had never felt so strange."

If Everett's good country people are, on balance, less prone to full-blown existential freak-outs or psychic disintegration than his writers and intellectuals, it's not because they're less self-reflective. It's because they are living lives they've chosen for themselves, far from the madness (social, political, and linguistic) of so-called culture. In "A High Lake," an elderly widow named Norma Snow sees solitude as coterminous with autonomy, and fights to preserve both.

She hired a nurse to come by once every day to make sure she was still upright and not stretched out helpless on the kitchen floor. Norma wanted the nurse for no more than that.... For nearly eight years she had been alone with her horse and her thoughts. She liked that they were her thoughts. They came like a glacier, moving slowly, and like any glacier they were a tsunami of ice, surging, unstoppable. She had completed a

catalog of the bird life on her place, with notes of songs and seasonal habits. She had finally read Proust and decided she did not like him, had decided the same about Henry James, had decided that Eudora Welty would have been her friend, and had come to think that Hemingway was not all that bad.

Norma's preference for Welty and Hemingway over Proust and James may or may not reflect Everett's personal taste, but it's a good shorthand for the style—acutely reserved and regional, eschewing interiority and all forms of the baroque—in which *Half an Inch of Water* is written. It's also a useful way to think about the difference between Everett's stories and novels.

Almost all of Everett's novels have a first-person narrator: a governing ego governed in turn by its fractured or frustrated attempts at self-definition. This perspective, more than anything else, is what Everett leaves behind in his short fiction. Only one of the nine stories in *Half an Inch of Water* is written in the first person.

Everett's novels suggest that the self is a patch job, a cognitive illusion. It's no surprise, then, that the shift to the third person in his short fiction feels like a kind of liberation, a sweet relief. And if the price of that shift is a loss of intimacy or immediacy, the reward is composure and lucidity—which, it turns out, are not the same as comprehension. You can see something clearly and still not know what to make of it, or even what it is.

In "Finding Billy White Feather," a man named Oliver Campbell discovers a note tacked to the back door of his house. The title character, White Feather, is offering twin foals for sale and encourages Oliver to get in touch, though he's provided no contact information. Oliver spends the rest of the story collecting contradictory accounts of White Feather: white people think he's an Indian, while the Indians insist he's a white guy, maybe some kind of fetishist or poseur. (White/Feather—get it?) The physical descriptions that Oliver gathers contradict one another, perhaps because nobody seems to have actually met the man, though everyone knows

someone who has a complaint against him. The only thing Oliver learns for certain is that the foals were never White Feather's to sell. Oliver finds himself in pursuit of a tall, short, skinny, fat, white Indian with black blond hair to whom, if he ever chases him down, he will have absolutely nothing to say.

Not every story in *Half an Inch of Water* is about misunderstanding and miscommunication. "The Day Comes" and "Exposure" both depict difficult relationships between fathers and their adolescent daughters. In each case an existential threat places life-or-death stakes on the protagonists' ability to communicate. They must hear each other or die. Within the universe of these stories, speaking, listening, and understanding are all presented as activities possessed of inherent value.

Everett's stories are his minor work, but they're a fine introduction to his themes and obsessions—to pretty much everything about him, in fact, except his major style—and *Half an Inch of Water* is a very good book, arguably the best collection of his career. The lost, the absent, and the missing figure powerfully, which in turn means that hope, however slender, often takes the form of recovery or reconciliation. In "Graham Greene," a 102-year-old Native American woman named Roberta Cloud asks a man named Jack Keene to find her long-lost son, Davy, who must be eighty, if he's alive. The tribal offices have no records of a Davy Cloud, and even Roberta's family denies that he ever existed. The photograph she gives to Keene turns out to show Graham Greene, not the British novelist but the Native American actor best known for his roles in *Thunderheart* and *Dances with Wolves*. Here's Keene's conversation with one woman on the reservation:

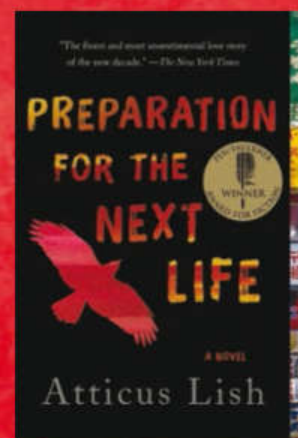
"Can I ask you a question?" Delores looked at my eyes. "Why are you doing all this?"

"I don't know. An old lady asked me to do something for her and I said I'd try."

"You could have said no," she said.

"I suppose I could have. But I didn't and here I am."

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YOUR
WAR,
SHE SAID.**



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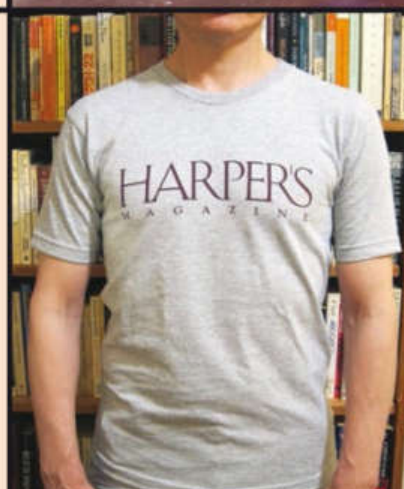
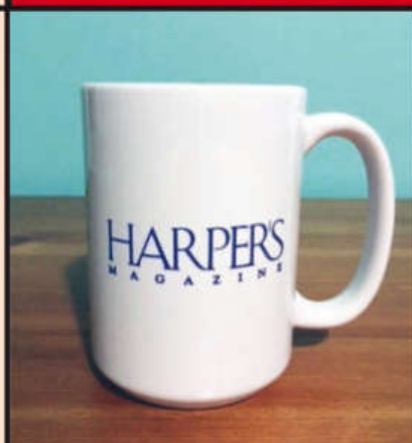
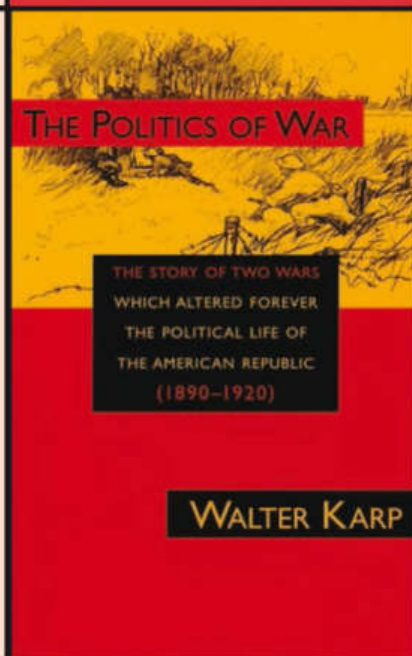
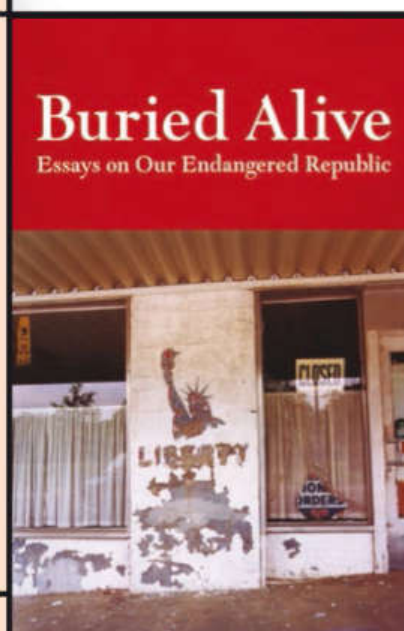
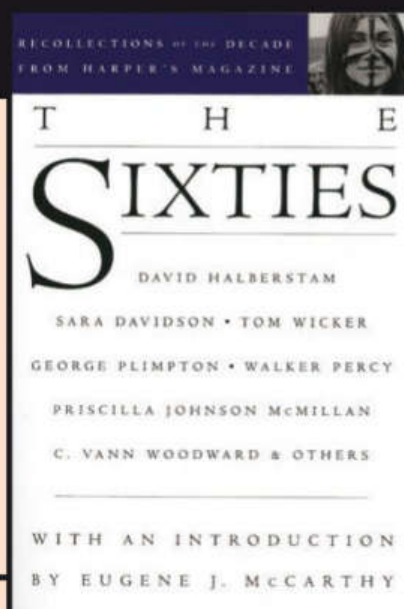
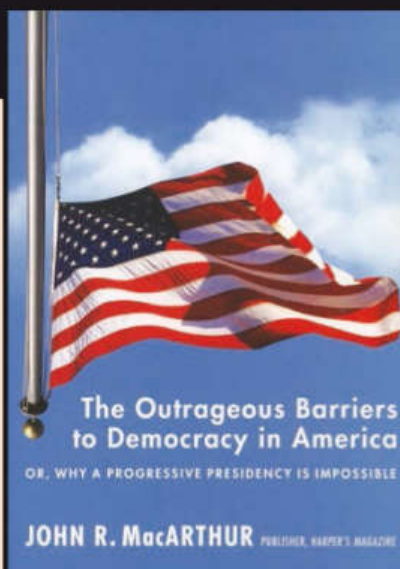
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PREFACE BY
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"You must have hurt somebody along the way, I guess."

"Excuse me?"

"You must be guilty about something."

I stared at her for a long few seconds. "Who isn't?"

Perhaps the other Graham Greene is in the air, after all. Jack's mission, in any case, is an utter failure. When he returns to give Roberta Cloud the bad news, he finds her on her deathbed, where, in her delirium, she mistakes Keene for Davy. She gets her reunion and says her farewell, while Keene is left uneasy, unsure whether his subterfuge has compounded or absolved his opaque, pervasive guilt.

Time and again in Everett's stories, characters are brought to confrontations with the inexplicable, and sometimes with the ineffable. Surprisingly, when the wonders of the invisible world exert pressure on the visible one, its borders expand to include them, rather than contract under their weight. The supernatural does not supersede the natural; it supercharges it. In "Stonefly," a fourteen-year-old boy becomes obsessed with catching an impossibly large trout in the river where his older sister drowned. In "Liquid Glass," one lowlife pays another a thousand dollars to pick up a mysterious package from a bus station—with equally mysterious, and macabre, results.

And in "A High Lake," Norma Snow's morning trail ride leads her one day to a canyon where "the flowers didn't make sense altogether, and the chickweed should have been long gone. . . . Then it occurred to her that the light was not changing, the sun was where it had been when she first rode into this place." A dog appears, apparently her own beloved Zach, who's been dead for years but has somehow been restored to a puppy. Norma gradually surmises that she is seeing a preview of the hereafter, emphasis on the "here." Whatever else the place is, it is, first and foremost, a place. A place real enough that her horse can graze there. A place where, when she's ready to leave, she can climb back into the saddle and ride home. ■

TRIAL AND ERROR

Three centuries of American witch hunts

By Ruth Franklin

Discussed in this essay:

The Witches: Salem, 1692, by Stacy Schiff. Little, Brown. 512 pages. \$32. littlebrown.com.

We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s, by Richard Beck. PublicAffairs. 352 pages. \$26.99. publicaffairsbooks.com.



One night in May 1692, Ann Foster and Martha Carrier hopped on a pole in Andover, Massachusetts, and flew twelve miles to a meadow in Salem Village. They picnicked on the grass and drank from a nearby brook before attending a meeting of about two dozen witches—a small fraction of the total number in New England at the time. The details of the meeting are unknown, but its purpose is not: the witches vowed to destroy Salem Village and set up "the devil's kingdom" there. At her trial, Carrier denied everything; she was hanged for witchcraft in August. Foster con-

fessed and survived in the Salem jail until December: under the strange rules that governed the village at the time, those who confessed to witchcraft were not put to death. After she died in prison—technically of natural causes, which were no doubt hastened by the jail's freezing, vermin-infested conditions—her son had to pay the bill for her upkeep, including the chains that shackled her, before he was allowed to bury her body.

In *The Witches*, her new book examining the Salem witchcraft trials, Stacy Schiff calls the events that took place in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1692—during which some two hundred people were accused of witchcraft, more than a hundred were imprisoned, and nineteen were executed—a "national nightmare" that "crackles, flickers, and jolts its way through American

Ruth Franklin is the author of *A Thousand Darknests: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford). Her biography of Shirley Jackson will be published next fall.

history and literature.” Like a dream, its images linger in the mind, half remembered and half imagined, equal parts tragedy and shame. The tragedy is obvious; the shame, more hidden. A sign of it, perhaps, is that, despite the Puritans’ typical fanaticism for record-keeping, the historical record of the events is incomplete. Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister and Salem’s most comprehensive and renowned

ographies, she drew complex, nuanced portraits of figures about whom little was known or whose histories had been overtaken by myth: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who died mysteriously not long after completing his uncanny fable *The Little Prince*, one of the best-loved children’s books of the twentieth century; Véra Nabokov, who projected the image of a demure wife but

extreme physical and psychic pressure. The adolescent girls who provoked the crisis were suffering from a classic case of Freudian hysteria. It’s not impossible, though Schiff doesn’t entertain the theory, that a fungus containing hallucinogenic chemicals may have infected the rye crop that year, causing many of the symptoms the girls experienced. But persuasive as some of these theories

may be, none addresses the real question of Salem: not just why it happened but why it continues to happen. That fatal repetition, and not the horrifying events that unfolded over a few months at the tail of the seventeenth century, is the true national nightmare, the American curse for which no counter-hex has yet been discovered.

The trouble in Salem began in January 1692, in the depths of an uncommonly brutal winter, when nine-year-old Betty Parris and eleven-year-old Abigail Williams, the daughter and niece of Samuel Parris, the village’s minister, began to complain of bites and pinches from “invisible agents.” The girls suffered from fits; they babbled deliriously and barked like dogs. Their condition was horrendously disruptive: even if Parris had been able to ignore their cries long enough to prepare his thrice-weekly sermons, he could hardly avoid the curious visitors who overran the household at all hours. At a time when children as young as five were relied on for heavy chores, such as spinning flax or sewing, the loss of the girls’ labor was a hardship for Parris, who had to manage his ministry and tend to a farm at the same time. (In a sign of just how strenuous life in the new colonies could be, the first person in New England who confessed to entering into a diabolical pact, a servant in Connecticut, had asked the devil for help with her chores.) The girls’ afflictions quickly spread to their friends and neighbors: in the court-



chronicler—he published twenty-two books between 1689 and 1691 alone—wrote his diary for 1692 in retrospect. The letters and diaries of Mather’s contemporaries, many of whom were meticulous chroniclers themselves, mysteriously elide the crucial months of the trials. As Schiff points out, the voices of the women at the heart of the drama—both the accusers and the accused—are the most difficult to make out, passed down to us by notetakers who were “far from thorough, seldom impartial, and not always transcribing in the room in which they heard [the] statements.” It is no wonder that Salem remains one of the darkest, strangest, and least understood episodes in American history.

Most writers would consider such gaps in the record a drawback. Schiff seems to regard them as a personal challenge. In her previous bi-

wielded spectacular behind-the-scenes power; and, most recently, Cleopatra, whose character Schiff reconstructed from a bare-bones historical record. Now she brings her gifts to the confusions of Salem, piecing together a dramatic narrative from disparate and often tersely unrevealing sources, including diaries, memoirs, and court reports. She never lacks for an apt detail, drawing on academic studies that focus on everything from the region’s sexual mores to the way sounds echoed in the atmosphere.

Yet for all Schiff’s historical acumen and storytelling flair, the mystery at the heart of her book remains unsolved—as perhaps it must. Explanations for the madness, at least hypothetical ones, can be marshaled from many perspectives. The colonists were under

room, they acted, Schiff writes, as a “demented acrobatics troupe,” screaming and convulsing throughout the trials.

One day when Parris and his wife were out of town, a neighbor took it upon herself to discover the cause of Abigail and Betty’s bewitchment. Following a familiar superstition, she directed John Indian, one of the family’s servants, to prepare a “witch cake” from the girls’ urine and to feed it to the family dog to reveal the source of the enchantment. The cake worked: the girls named several local women as their tormentors. The first was Sarah Good, a sporadically homeless beggar. Schiff describes her as “something of a local menace” who “would seem to have wandered into the village directly from the Brothers Grimm, were it not for the fact that they had not been born yet.” Good’s father committed suicide when she was eighteen, her first husband died and left her all his debts, and a series of lawsuits impoverished her; she had recently visited the parsonage to beg. Those who gave her charity tended to regret it: a local couple who took her in threw her out after six months because she was “so maliciously bent,” threatening them and insulting their children. Questioned by John Hathorne, a justice of the peace who took charge of the interrogations, Good refused to explain her odd behavior. Her own husband eventually testified against her for acting malevolently toward him, calling her “an enemy to all good.”

Pressed to name an accomplice, Good suggested Sarah Osborne, who had also been identified by the girls. This was only logical: since Good knew that she was herself no witch, Osborne must have been the culprit. But Osborne had been ill and bedridden for several years and could hardly have conveyed an impression of menace. (She died in jail soon after her arrest.) The only other possibility was Tituba, a slave in Parris’s household, who had also been named. (John Indian, the baker of the witch cake, was her husband.) She played the part of witch well, inventing stories with all the gusto of a “satanic Scheherazade,” as Schiff puts it. Tituba said that a tall, white-haired man in a dark serge coat had appeared in the parsonage one day and threatened to kill her if

she did not hurt the girls. With him was a yellow bird, which he offered her. Good and Osborne, she said, had also given her orders.

Soon other “witches” would be named by these girls and their peers: Martha Corey, who had given birth to a biracial son before her first marriage, was imprisoned along with her husband; then Rebecca Nurse, a devout great-grandmother who had raised eight of her own children, as well as an orphan. “Hard of hearing, and full of grief,” as she pathetically told her interrogator, Nurse had trouble making out some of the questions put to her. These women were only the beginning. The list of those accused in Salem was not restricted by gender, social standing, or even species: it included more than forty men and nearly 150 women, from pillars of society to impoverished wretches, as well as two dogs.

According to the definition proposed by the English clergyman Joseph Glanvill, whose *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681) was a cornerstone text in the history of witchcraft and well known to late-seventeenth-century New Englanders, a witch was “one who can do or seems to do strange things, beyond the known power of art and ordinary nature, by virtue of a confederacy with evil spirits.” Given the rich historical tradition related to magic, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the practices Glanvill described, such as the making of potions, had a basis in reality. A village healer with a deep knowledge of herbalism might well have been considered a witch.

Though Glanvill does not specify a gender in his definition, the witch of European folklore is nearly always female, with powers at once supernatural and mundane that are centered in the kitchen and the barn. (Before witches rode brooms, they got around on pitchforks.) The talent for witchcraft was passed down from mother to daughter, and many witches worked their magic using devices traditionally associated with women, including charms, ointments, and dolls. Their most dangerous trait may have been their intelligence. “When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil,”

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warned the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or "Hammer of Witches" (1487), another classic text. Glanvill writes that *witch* means simply "wise woman," and is derived from the verb *weet*, or "know": "a Witch ... is no more than a knowing woman."

If so-called witches had troubled New England since its creation, Schiff writes, so had women more generally, who "claimed the starring roles as heretics and rebels." What does it mean, after all, to "place the very emblem of lowly domestic duty between your legs and ride off, defying the bounds of community and laws of gravity?" Anne Hutchinson, the Puritan spiritual leader, famously challenged church doctrine and encouraged women to walk out of church services. The popular genre of Native American captivity narratives, by female survivors of Indian attacks, such as Mary Rowlandson, glorified the daring deeds of women who defeated "savages" by dint of their own ingenuity. And, as witnesses, women dominated the Salem trials: their voices were so authoritative that the beyond-the-grave reports of the deceased wives of George Burroughs, a Harvard-educated minister, were considered more reliable than those of their living husband.

Burroughs's case notwithstanding, the women who raised their voices in court were almost always testifying against other women. If women were able to command a certain kind of power in Puritan New England, they were also uniquely vulnerable to violence and exploitation—which, Schiff notes, is often omitted from the Salem narrative: "We have turned a story of women in peril into one about perilous women." Children were considered adults starting at age fourteen, by which time many of them had been sent to lodge with other families as servants. Both boys and girls were sent out, but girls were especially vulnerable to harassment by the men of the house and by visitors; physical and sexual abuse was common. Running away was difficult in a time when roads were limited and Native Americans lurked in the woods; escape would be far easier on a broomstick. Women of all ages also risked

assault—by their neighbors or by Native Americans—when left at home alone. "It is interesting that spectral women so frequently disturbed men in their beds throughout 1692 when in the visible world the opposite occurred with some frequency," Schiff writes.

The first women accused all lived on the margins of society: they were the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. In the end, the witch trials were no less hierarchical and patriarchal than the milieu that created them; it did not take long for the magistrates in charge to conclude that the witches were not acting on their own. Here was yet another way of dealing with unruly women: forcing them to admit their subservience to someone, even if that someone was the devil.

The events in Salem were not without precedent; similar witch trials had taken place in Europe since the fifteenth century. But why did this blaze ignite again in the New World? Schiff offers a variety of theories. The colony, like the girls who initiated the charges, was in its adolescence, grasping at independence yet unsure of its footing. When the trials began, Massachusetts had not had a charter for several years (a new one arrived from England in the midst of the panic). The colonists suffered from numerous stresses, including severe weather, hostile Native Americans, and the general hardships of seventeenth-century life. There was no privacy: the average household packed six people into four rooms, and everyone knew everyone else's secrets. As Schiff points out, the girls' symptoms correspond with what Freud called hysteria and what we now think of as conversion disorder, in which powerlessness manifests as disease:

Where the seventeenth-century authority saw the devil, we tend to recognize an overtaxed nervous system ... the body literally translating emotions into symptoms. ... The girls expressed in fits what they could not communicate in words, or what no one seemed to hear when they entrusted it to words.

If we can make some sense of why the panic began, it is much harder to

understand the way people behaved in its grip. The perverse logic of the interrogations and later trials seems particularly horrific considering the seriousness of the alleged crimes—in the colonists' hierarchy of sin, witchcraft was second only to idolatry. Why did innocents spontaneously confess to unheard-of crimes, inventing outlandish stories that went far beyond the initial accusations? Why did the court reward admitted witches by sparing their lives and gruesomely put to death some (but not all) of those who denied the charges? Hathorne conducted himself, Schiff argues, like a police interrogator rather than a judge: "It fell to him to establish not the truth of the charges but the guilt of the suspect." When Sarah Good denied familiarity with any evil spirit, he questioned her "as if she had said just the opposite." Neither Hathorne nor anyone else in the courtroom noticed the inconsistencies in Tituba's story: that she had already been arrested by the time she claimed to have had the first conversation with the man in the serge coat or that she apparently flew on a stick to a meeting held in her own back yard. Martha Carrier, who was thirty-eight, was said to have been a witch for forty years. One woman confessed rather than be imprisoned in the dungeon with Burroughs, whom she feared. It was easier to tell the prosecutors wildly implausible fictions than to convince them of credible facts: if an accused witch claimed to have signed the devil's book, her inquisitor would believe her, "but if she told the truth and said she had not set her hand to the book a hundred times, he would not believe her."

It is the miscarriage of justice that, to the modern mind, is especially disturbing. The methods of identifying witches—imported from European witch hunts—were barbaric and nonsensical. One option was the "touch test": a bewitched girl, it was said, could be calmed by the touch of the witch who had enchanted her. It appears that no one worried about how easily this could be faked. Another test was the invasive, humiliating, and fruitless search for a "witch's mark." Three

suspects had "a preternatural excrescence of flesh between the pudendum and anus," but later the marks could not be found again. Matters got so out of hand that Cotton Mather drafted more than one document to criticize the tactics of the court, urging the justices not to rely on "spectral evidence" or allegations of supernatural powers. Burroughs mounted the most reasonable, and thus most surprising, defense: there was no such thing as a witch, he told the courtroom. But if witches did not exist, then the court had sent innocents to their deaths. The more alleged witches died, the more necessary it became to affirm the power of witchcraft.

Schiff declines to speculate about why the witch trials abruptly ended less than a year after they began. "It was as if all simply, suddenly awoke, shaking off their strange tales, from a collective preternatural dream," she writes. This would be an unsatisfying conclusion for any dramatic historical event, but it is all the more so in the case of Salem. Why the events there transpired the way they did is an urgent historical question, for the simple reason that it is not merely a historical question. The most astonishing thing about the episode—and the reason why explanations that depend on its historical moment, like Schiff's, ultimately feel insufficient—is that it was not an isolated incident. Minor witch panics took place in Philadelphia in 1787 and again in Salem in the late nineteenth century. More alarmingly, the menace, like a virus, has proved capable of evolving to suit its circumstances. In the 1950s, we had McCarthyism; the witch trials served so well as a natural allegory that key details of the events in Salem did not need to be altered in Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*.

As Richard Beck demonstrates in *We Believe the Children*, his passionately argued new book, the 1980s gave us yet another version of the Salem nightmare. In the summer of 1983, a California woman named Judy Johnson became convinced that her son was being abused at his day-care center, the well-regarded McMartin Preschool in Manhattan

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Beach, an affluent suburb of Los Angeles. Although her reasons remain unclear, they likely had to do with her own mental state—she was later diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. The first physician to whom she brought her son found nothing suspicious, but another was persuaded to file a suspected-child-abuse report. The first suspect was Ray Buckey, the adult grandson of the school's founder and its only male teacher. Though no other teacher had noticed signs that Buckey was behaving improperly with children, no other children alleged abuse, and no child pornography or any other evidence of abuse was discovered, Buckey was arrested.

Shortly thereafter, the Manhattan Beach Police Department sent a letter to the parents of some two hundred current and former students at the school, asking them to question their children for evidence of sexual abuse. Ordinary incidents—a vaginal infection, a child's curiosity about a sibling's genitals—suddenly seemed suspicious. Parents who had previously found no reason to worry about their children's treatment at McMartin became convinced that abuse had taken place. Meanwhile, Johnson's reports of her son's stories became more and more outrageous: she would ultimately allege that Ray and other teachers had taken children out of school, without their parents' knowledge, even on plane trips, to participate in satanic rituals. The suggestion would have sounded insane a decade earlier, but the idea of "recovered memory" had gained new currency and brought satanic cults into the public discussion.

Beck makes the case that the climate of gossip and rumor that pervaded Manhattan Beach was abetted by a growing industry of therapists who had recently overhauled their ap-

proach to treating children whom they suspected of being abused. Whereas physicians had once been extremely reluctant to accuse parents or others of abuse, by the late Seventies the tide had shifted. "If children say they are abused, then they are always telling the truth," Beck writes, summarizing the position of Roland Summit, a local psychiatrist who was considered an expert on child abuse despite a notable lack of experience treating it. It became a point of honor for therapists to insist that they always believed children's abuse stories—a bias that led them to overlook other factors that might have influenced those stories, such as suggestive questioning by adults. Ironically, at the very same time as this non-abuse was being investigated, actual cases of institutional abuse in the Boy Scouts and the Catholic Church, to give just two well-known examples, were being covered up—a point Beck does not address.

Beck places much of the blame for the McMartin episode on Kee MacFarlane, a social worker who was responsible for questioning many of the children. Despite the lack of evidence, MacFarlane was irrationally convinced that abuse had taken place, and used unorthodox play therapy and blatantly coercive questioning techniques to elicit responses that confirmed her suspicions. MacFarlane intimidated children by calling them "scaredy cats" and suggesting that others had "told already." "Are you smart, or are you dumb?" she asked at least one child. At the same time, a number of parents took it upon themselves to conduct their own investigations, driving their children around the city to look for sites that would trigger memories of abuse and excavating a vacant lot next to the school. Nothing was found.

The parallels with Salem are striking. For the political and social situation in the seventeenth-century colony, substitute a toxic therapy climate and a conservative culture that stigmatized working women and demonized day care. Pressed—sometimes bullied—to provide the answers their questioners wanted to hear, many children made up stories that now sound incredible. Despite invasive examinations of children's genitals—one G.P. came up with a test for a child's anus meant to prove that sodomy had taken place, and used a magnifying device to detect "micro-trauma" to girls' hymens—there was no definitive physical evidence of abuse; the physician's methods were eventually proved unsound. After an investigation and trial that lasted more than six years, Ray Buckey and his mother, Peggy McMartin Buckey, were acquitted. Nonetheless, the damage to their reputations cannot be quantified—nor can the damage done to the hundreds of children who were recklessly encouraged to dredge up "memories" of a terrible crime.

Beck's narrative is compellingly drawn, and his research is exhaustive; he seems to have exhumed every document pertaining to the McMartin case, as well as several similar episodes elsewhere. But he, like Schiff, addresses only the question of why those events unfolded in the particular way that they did, at one particular moment—not why this hydra-like form of communal social hysteria can be stamped out in one place only to rear another ugly head elsewhere. Perhaps there is no answer to that question—or, at least, no answer we want to hear. Politics, social mores, human psychology, a rye-eating fungus: all these submit calmly to our investigations. But a hard core of evil in the soul of humankind? That might be the real witchcraft, one we dare not examine too closely. ■

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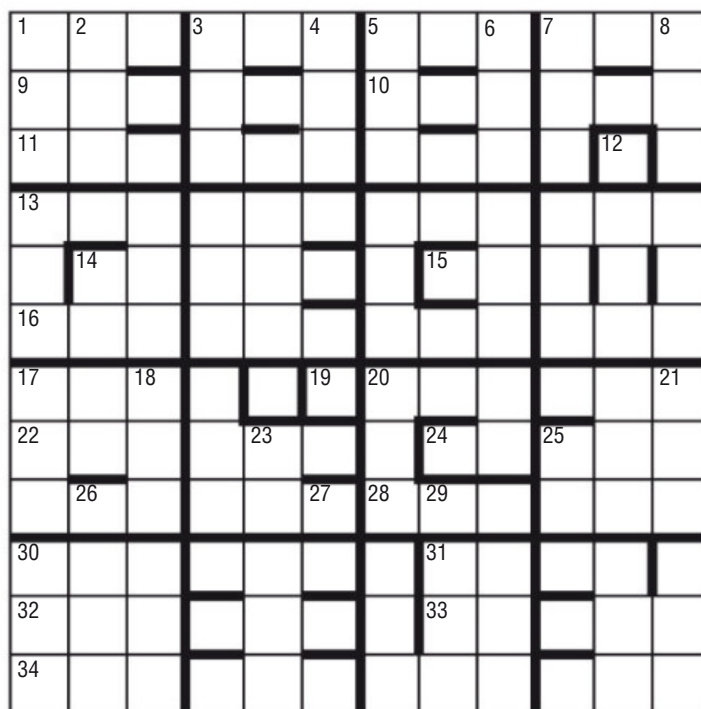
CRAZY QUILT

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

(with acknowledgments to *Albepedius of The Listener*)

Answers begin at their appropriate numbers and run horizontally or vertically as usual until they reach a grid line. (Grid lines cross the diagram every three spaces.) When a grid line is reached, the answer *may* be displaced by one row (horizontal entries) or one column (vertical entries). The answer *may* be displaced again when the next grid line is reached, and so on. Each answer is displaced at least once.

Clue answers include four proper names, one of which (11A) is a local spelling and uncommon. 13A, 15A, and 3D are uncommon. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 55.



ACROSS

1. The definitive manifestation of the human comedy is a crime (12)*
9. Turned up as a trap—it's a setup (9)
10. Republican one flips over: white Anglo-Saxon Protestant! What a cutup! (6)
11. Footloose or shod, showing an island as the Greeks write it (6)
13. Badly built pound, with ridiculously underlit exterior (3-6)
14. Practice seeing about CNN layouts in action (11)
15. Terrify, old-style, at a distance, taking ecstasy (5)
16. Well-grounded company man (6)
17. Happening under pressure, strike leads to unexpected hiatus (7)
19. Josephine, e.g.—temptress having no time for us at all! (7)
22. A hanging could be silent—listen (6)
24. Unnatural mania for where babies come from (5)
28. Rude, oafish, smallish type comes first—or last (6)
30. From other lines, some characters show warmth and caring (12)
31. Resort reaches limits in the flood (5)
32. Train tied up in late morning (6)
33. Frontless undergarments? Plant kisses here! (4)
34. Historic French lover couldn't have been seedier—or could she! (7)

DOWN

1. Tony's girl given almost stylish band (8)
2. A field sport, private, has, without starting, serious defenses (9)
3. As the N.Y. dictionary defines it: "abnormal loss of strength" (7)
4. Burr and others, a Reagan in like surroundings (6)
5. Dolly gets run down after getting let off outside (7)
6. Form of herpes, something that's going around (6)
7. Mud rafts, surprisingly stable (4,4)
8. Causes smells, as the saying goes (6)
12. Outlaws in favor of writers? (10)
14. Put in uniform tuition, connected to university medicine (8)
18. Something's underfoot—but only in leading (6)
20. Traveling U.S. mile for oat meal? (6)
21. The old-fashioned S.A.T.'s—funny, you get a rise out of them (6)
23. Perfection, to some, is catch-up (3)
25. Loose change, in pun (5)
26. People with reservations losing million in minutes (4)
27. Wind's up—it has a bad look (4)
29. A *Christmas Carol* is a book with no heart (4)

* My favorite clue ever

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Crazy Quilt," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by November 13. The sender of the first correct solution opened at random will receive a one-year subscription to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). The winner's name will be printed in the January issue. The winner of the September puzzle, "Foursomes," is Georgene Gallo, Glenshaw, Pa.



FINDINGS

The universe is still dying but Earth is not, after all, about to run out of helium. The planet was found to have 3 trillion trees, not 400 billion; humanity was found to have killed another 3 trillion. Evolutionary biologists published the first full draft of the tree of life. Pregnant woodland caribou of the Klinse-Za herd were being airlifted out of the South Peace to avoid extinction. Snowpack in the Sierra Nevada was at a 500-year low. Scans confirmed the presence of lungs in living coelacanths, of a river under Chichén Itzá, and of a superhenge next to Stonehenge. The Philistines brought opium to Israel. China planned to send a probe to the dark side of the moon. Tons of microplastic waste from shower gels washed into the seas around Britain. Climate scientists determined that a “burn it all” approach to fossil fuels would cause sea levels to rise nearly 200 feet. California sea stars continued to melt, and scientists prepared to release the COTSBOT, which will roam the Great Barrier Reef killing crown-of-thorns starfish by lethal injection. When eating carcasses, white-tailed eagles ignore bullet fragments smaller than 8 millimeters. A Texan was wounded by his own bullet after it ricocheted off an armadillo. A crow rode an eagle. A red-winged blackbird rode a red-tailed hawk. A seal rode a whale off New South Wales. Scientists in Wales recovered memories from rats in whom they had induced complete amnesia. Black holes remember.

Leicester women instructed to drink beakers of vodka and tonic accurately recalled a role-playing scenario of being raped by an average-looking man. Black Baltimore women who binge drink report unexpected and unwanted sexual experiences. Female Trinidadian guppies exposed to high levels of male sexual coercion become faster swimmers. Women in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Zimbabwe who are married to polygamous or

alcoholic husbands are at high risk of domestic violence. A study of 1,078 female Burmese timber elephants born between 1941 and 1999 found that stressed elephants gave birth to offspring who aged faster and reproduced less. Among the 14,676 Bristolians who were enrolled as fetuses in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children in 1991 and 1992, those who became goths were the most depressed at age eighteen, ahead of those who became bimbos, chavs, keeners, loners, populars, skaters, and the sporty.

Australian PE teachers don't like fat kids.

Parasitic male fig wasps behead the males of species with which they do not compete, possibly because it is too dark to recognize one's enemies inside a fig. The racism of the blind is not visual. The presence of a white man increases the generosity of Sierra Leoneans pretending to be dictators. Sociologists found that dark skin tone lowers employment opportunities for male U.S. immigrants within a given racial group, but not for female immigrants. Men who feel unmasculine and insecure are more likely to assault and injure other people with weapons, while contentedly unmasculine men tend not to be violent. The brains of newly psychotic Finns showed unusual activity in the precuneus during a screening of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. The right anterior insula is consistently shrunken among Japanese, Chinese, and British schizophrenics. The throats of schizophrenics were found to have peculiar microbiomes. Psychopaths are less prone to contagious yawning, and roughness gives human screams their alarming quality. Spontaneous domestic murderers are less intelligent and more mentally ill than premeditated nondomestic murderers. A ten-year study found that punching glass is very dangerous. Researchers were pleased with their vomiting machine, and Viennese giraffes hum to one another in the nighttime. ■

*“Three Attached Lava Trees, East Rift Zone, Hawai’i, 2003” and “Lava Tree, East Rift Zone, Hawai’i, 2007,”
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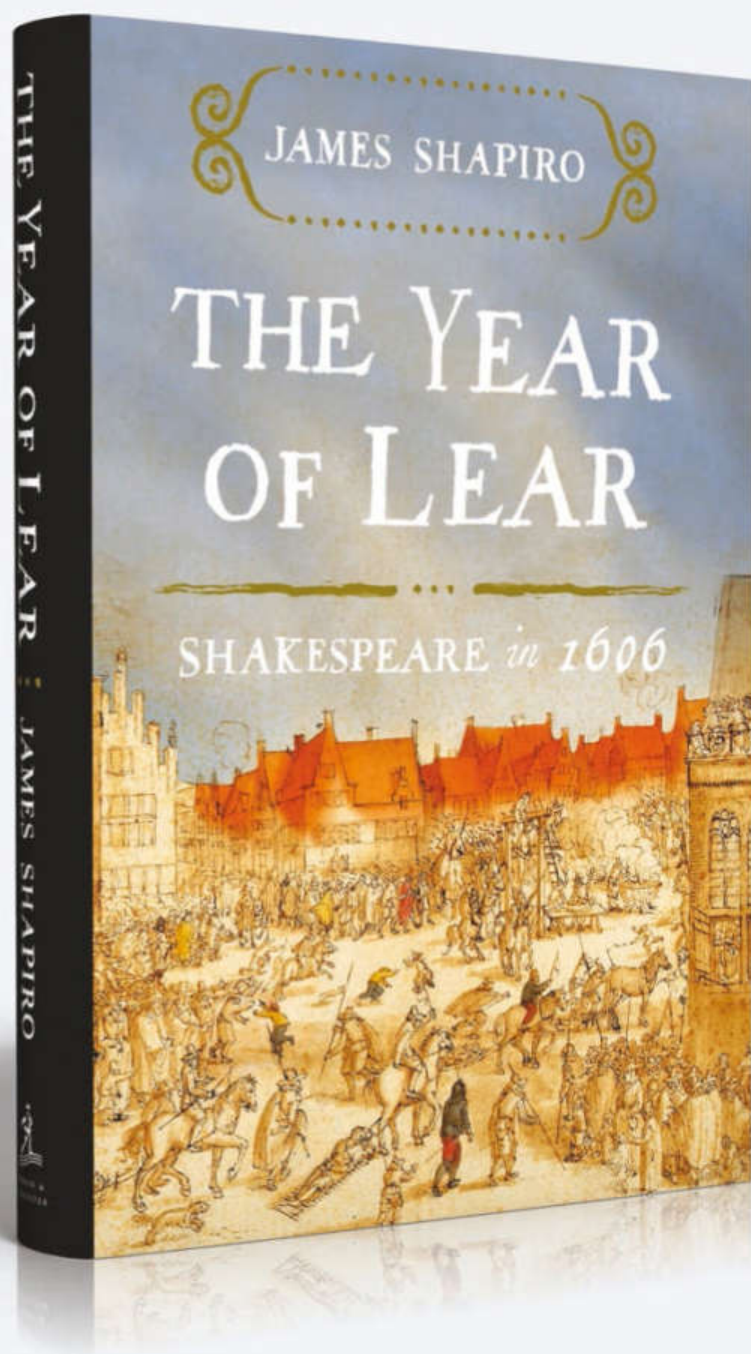
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